

AFTER
THE VICTORIANS

by

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PREFACE

THIS book continues the story of English readers from 1887—the year which was reached in the author's previous work, *The Victorians and their Books*—to the outbreak of the Great War. It does not pretend to give an account of the writers of that period, nor does it attempt any criticism of their works—except so far as this is contained in the opinions of contemporary readers. It devotes considerable space to some writers—Alfred Austin, Marie Corelli, Hall Caine, Mrs. Humphry Ward, Anthony Hope, Conan Doyle, Sarah Grand, Elinor Glyn—who do not appear or have only slight mention in Histories of English Literature; and this because these writers, in their day, were read by a large proportion of the English public—a larger proportion, in some cases, than read the works of their greater contemporaries. Books from abroad are considered only as they affected English readers, not in relation to the literature of the country from which they came.

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CHAPTER I

AFTER VICTORIANISM

THE Queen's Jubilee of 1887 showed Victorianism apparently triumphant; yet actually its decline had already begun. For some time the lines that enclosed the area of its influence had shown signs of weakening, and gaps had been made through which stragglers had passed to the lawless realms outside. Henceforward the process was to be hastened, until the whole crumbled and fell. This did not mean the end of Victorianism, for many people of their own free will and choice remained within what was to them the charmed circle, drawing the closer to its centre in their alarm and horror at the rebel forces that were desecrating its borders. Yet the fact remained that the barriers were down. Those who wished might pass freely out and find what joy they could in hooting derisively and casting large stones at the seemly memorials of a past age.

They found, apparently, much joy in these exercises and they pursued them vigorously. For a time it seemed as if destruction were their only aim; but soon a new creative energy emerged. The period that followed was, before all else, a period of ceaseless and restless experiment. What laws shall we obey now that we have repudiated Victorianism? What shall we build upon the ruins of the things we have thrown down? What Beatific Vision shall replace that seen by our fathers? There must, it was felt, somewhere be satisfying answers to these questions, and with almost feverish energy the new generation set itself to find them.

What the England of that day was really witnessing was the search for a new ideal. It was carried on often foolishly, selfishly and arrogantly, but it was a real and earnest search. Unhappily, the searchers in starting handicapped themselves severely, for they decided that nothing of the old must remain to mingle with the new. Victorian steadiness, conscientiousness, reticence, loyalty, dignity must go, along with Victorian stiffness, sentimentality and stultifying care for appearances. Thus the solid foundations on which an ideal must be built were rejected, and that which could be raised without them was too formless and unsubstantial to stand the test of time. Many such structures were quickly raised and

almost as quickly fell, until at last it seemed to the disheartened builders that the sites were only fit for the flimsy palaces of pleasure; and so came in the tinsel and glitter of the Edwardian epoch.

It follows that the readers of the 'nineties came to their books in a spirit very different from that which had moved their fathers. They wanted, above all, something that was new, something that would set their feet upon an as yet untrodden way. Along that way the ideal might be found. All that was strange was welcome, though it might be startling, ugly, even in a sense revolting. Shocks such as had been grievous to their fathers were to them a necessary excitement. They cried out loudly, but it was rather with the exhilaration of discovery than with the pain of an unexpected blow.

It was not merely the natural and usual process of the young outgrowing the ideals of their elders that was going on. It was something more violent and more headstrong. There was a break, or an attempted break, in continuity. Like the advanced young man of Miss May Sinclair's *Tree of Heaven*, these ruthless image-breakers would destroy the great works of the past in order that a new generation of creators might grow up untouched by their influence. "I believe in Browning, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Milton and Swinburne," so ran the creed,

but I do not believe in their imitators. Therefore they must be destroyed. You can't destroy their imitators unless you destroy them. They breed the disgusting parasites. . . . Art has got to be made young and new and clean. There isn't any disinfectant that'll do the trick. So long as the old masters are kow-towed to as masters people will go on imitating them. When a poet ceases to be a poet and becomes a centre of corruption he must go.

Only Shakespeare was to be spared, for him no one had succeeded in imitating.

Here, then, was the chance for young, untried writers. They were not to be overshadowed by their great elders. If they had anything fresh to say they were sure of a hearing. Many such appeared, had their short, triumphant day of influence, were found wanting, and vanished. Few survived the test that required them to contribute something to help the nation in its need. No great writer arose speaking to the people with a compelling voice. There were not wanting those who pointed the way to things changeless and

eternal, but they had not the power, which belongs to genius alone, to inspire the multitude. They could not, as the great Victorians had done, make themselves the recognized prophets of their generation. Even Rudyard Kipling, strong as was his influence, failed to make a universal appeal.

The readers of the 'nineties took their books seriously. The age has been called frivolous, but really it was almost desperately in earnest. Its recklessness, its egotism, its irreverence, even its immorality were all symptoms of its determination to let nothing stand in the way of its finding what it wanted. Of the thousands who devoured the works of Marie Corelli not all were attracted by their cheap sensationalism; some read them because there seemed a chance that in the amazing views they set forward some new ideal of life might be found. When the nation made fun of Alfred Austin it did so as much because it recognized that his pretty verses had no regenerating power as because he occasionally expressed himself in grotesque commonplace. Those of us who were young in those days will remember the high seriousness with which we came to our books, how we weighed the views that they expressed, and discussed them with the gravity of elder statesmen as well as with the eager audacity of youth.

It was the day of literary societies. The family was losing the place it had held under Victorianism as the reading unit of the nation. It was no longer customary for the household to assemble in the evening while one of its members read aloud. The family bookcase was no longer the general literary storehouse; the books that came through the family subscription to the circulating library no longer represented a common choice; the family censor no longer exercised absolute authority. The cleavage between the young and the old made both, but especially the young, turn to their own contemporaries for the eager, endless discussion of ideas and theories that was felt to be a necessity of those questing years. The University Extension Society, which had been founded in 1872 and was especially active during the 'nineties, did something towards meeting this need by promoting the formation of little groups for reading and study, but for the most part the societies formed were the result of the urge felt by individuals to express themselves, and to take their part in what they believed to be a general forward movement. Sometimes an old and moribund society was startled into new life as the Scientific and Philosophical

Society of Coalchester in Richard le Gallienne's *Zion Chapel* was startled by two audacious young men who introduced it to Tolstoi and Ibsen, and to "a great Paris moralist called Zola and a strange old American father called Walt Whitman." Such of the Browning Societies as still existed began to concern themselves less with the Master's verbal conundrums and more with his views on life. The search for a new political and social ideal drew many people into societies such as the Venturist Society of Mrs. Humphry Ward's *Marcella*, where they read the works of Karl Marx and Lassalles and the poems of William Morris. Then there were the "cranks"—those whose search for the ideal was narrow and unintelligent, though intensely earnest. H. G. Wells, in *Ann Veronica*, has described one of their societies. It met under the auspices of a Mr. and Mrs. Goopes who were "following a fruitarian career upon an upper floor in Theobalds Road." Mr. Goopes was a mathematical tutor, and his wife "wrote a weekly column in *New Ideas* upon vegetarian cookery, vivisection, degeneration, the lacteal secretion, appendicitis and the Higher Thought generally." It met on Saturday evenings and talked from nine o'clock into the small hours on Anarchism and Socialism, the Hegelian philosophy, and a new substitute for dripping in vegetarian cookery which Mrs. Goopes was convinced exercised an exceptionally purifying influence upon the mind; of Nietzsche and Tolstoi, the *Kreutzer Sonata* and *Resurrection*; of love, Platonic and otherwise; of *The Egoist* and Bernard Shaw, vegetarianism and teetotalism, Chesterton and Belloc. Passages from certain daring essays by authors belonging to the advanced school of thought were read aloud, and there were fruitarian refreshments—chestnut sandwiches buttered with nutter, and lemonade.

Most numerous of all were the societies like the Stowell Reading Society, described by Miss Macnaughten in *A Lame Dog's Diary*. It was founded because some of the younger members of the village families felt that "Stowell is getting behind the rest of the world in its knowledge of the best literature." Its members wrote essays on various literary subjects, and met in each other's drawing-rooms to listen to these, to read poetry aloud, and to discuss in minutest detail the style of the book chosen for study. "We have become so learned and full of culture that it is impossible to say where it will end. . . . Ordinary conversation is now hardly known in Stowell, and tea parties take the form of discussions."

It is easy to make fun of these societies, and there was in them indeed much that was silly and pretentious and unreal. But their original impulse was an interest in books and in the bearing of books on life. At no other time, probably, have books been talked about so widely, tirelessly and eagerly. The Victorians loved their books better—except those they definitely hated, but they did not analyse and discuss them as did these readers of the 'nineties. Between Victorian readers and their great writers there had been a sympathy which had helped to a clear understanding of their works; and when once a writer had established his position his pronouncements had been received with respect, almost with reverence, even when he had lashed his hearers for their shortcomings. But these post-Victorians accepted nothing, and respect and reverence were qualities which the new generation rather despised. The books they liked best were those which gave them most to argue about, which put forward new theories or set before their readers some problem which required strenuous effort for its working out.

This intense interest in books, along with other impulses that had moved the nation during the early 'nineties, slackened as the century drew towards its close. It seemed as if all the energy that had been expended was to bear but little fruit. Men concerned for the country's welfare noticed with uneasiness certain threatening signs. Canon Barnett, writing in 1897 with special reference to social matters, said:—

There is no longer the widespread eagerness to get knowledge or a consciousness of a nearing time that would make demands on that knowledge. There is not the same public conscience nor the same social interests. There is instead a keener search for personal pleasure, a disposition to enjoy our forefathers' savings, and somewhat insolent assertions of power. There is that sullen calm and those angry flashes which make good sailors anxious.

H. W. Nevinson noted this same year of 1897 as marking the end of a phase of the national life. The years "say from the last month of 1891 to the third month of 1897 were for me as for so many people in that variegated age of English life a period of strangely vivid interest and strangely diverse pursuits," he says. After 1897 came the passing of that "variegated age" into one

that had lost its colour and diversity though it glittered and palpitated with a feverish brilliance.

The early years of King Edward's reign saw the new order established. But though the foreground was now occupied by readers of a very different type from the eager seekers of the 'nineties, the quickening spirit of that age was still at work among less conspicuous but more vital groups. The Edwardians failed to extinguish it, as the rebel Victorians had failed to extinguish the spirit that informed their fathers. The three types of readers lived on side by side until the Great War came with fresh influences, both destructive and creative.

One result of the demand for books by readers of the 'nineties had naturally been an increase in the supply. When Miss Berta Ruck tells us that at the age of twelve (somewhere about 1890) she read in one summer all the works of Sir Walter Scott, *Vanity Fair*, all Keats, *The Wide, Wide World*, *Little Women*, *Good Wives*, all the works of John Strange Winter, all the poems of Byron and Wordsworth, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, it is easy to see that with readers of this capacity growing up, the demand for books would in a few years become enormous. Nor would it be satisfied with works handed down from previous ages. As soon as the young people reached the stage of keen interest in the world about them, new books would be urgently called for; and new books would be supplied.

It is not suggested that Miss Ruck was entirely typical, but she was certainly not an isolated instance of a voracious reader. There were at that time many eager young devourers of books, such as are almost unknown in this age, with its wireless and its cinemas and its countless other distractions. They fed, for the most part as in the case of Miss Ruck, not on fare specially prepared for them, but on a mixed diet drawn from the national supplies. Their appetite did not suffer through surfeit, but remained fresh and unappeased through their adult years.

To many people this increase in output seemed portentous and alarming, and the cry that has been raised so many times, "of the making of books there is no end," was raised now. Superficiality would be encouraged, young minds would be misled, mental indigestion on a vast scale would ruin the intellectual life of the country. Yet, as the people of less hasty judgment pointed out, it was only a question of making a choice. "I have no sym-

pathy," said Mr. A. J. Balfour, "with the people who complain over the incessant accumulation of books. They need hurt no one who possesses the moderate degree of social courage required to make the admission that he has not read the last new novel or the current number of a fashionable magazine." To those who read mainly that they might be in the fashion this offered no solution of their difficulties; other more independent minds solved the problem by almost total neglect of the popular literature. Lady Beerbohm Tree says concerning her husband that "he read but two novels during the whole of our married life, *Tess* and *Without Dogma* (a novel of modern Poland by Henryk Sienkiewicz), though once on a motor journey to Margate he was absorbed in and nearly finished *The Card*."

Not only were more books being produced, but they were being brought within the reach of more people. Miss Vera Britain, after reading *Romola* in 1913, wrote in her diary, "It is wonderful to be able to purchase so much rapture for two and sixpence." She might have gone further and reflected on the rapture to be obtained for less than a quarter of that sum, for long before 1913 the neat sevenpenny editions that pre-War readers knew so well were providing, if not *Romola*, other stories of equal interest and delight. Nor was it only stories that had thus been made available to the many. As early as 1888 Randall Davidson, then Dean of Windsor, had said, "A shilling (minus discount) will procure you in a neat brown cover a comprehensive manual on any subject in earth or sea or sky."

This increase in the number of new books adds to the difficulty of any attempt to discover the reading habits of the age in any detail; but a greater difficulty comes with the disappearance of those distinctions which, in previous generations, divided readers, roughly, into classes. For now there was no body of people, like the chapel-goers of earlier times, to whom a certain type of book was strictly taboo; no select society like that of the Tractarians which cherished a certain author as its own peculiar property. Education was doing its levelling work and "difficult" books were now read, not in one class only, but by readers scattered throughout all classes. The three-volume novel at ten and sixpence a volume had disappeared, and on the basis of the sevenpenny editions, rich and poor could meet and read in common enjoyment. The young had claimed the right to read what they liked, so the distinction

between their books and those of their elders had passed. On the other hand, there was no great writer whom everybody read and that also, in a different way, increases the difficulty of the historian's task. Reading had become, more than it had ever been before, a matter of individual taste, though as time went on the influence of mass suggestion and mass production was strongly felt.

The most fruitful method of inquiry would thus seem to lie in the selection of individual readers whose tastes may fairly be considered as representative of others of their type. The choice of these is necessarily restricted since so very few readers have left anything like a detailed record of the books they read and their reactions to them. To those who have done so grateful thanks are due. Mr. John Bailey may stand as representing the reader of culture and leisure and fine critical ability. Anne Douglas Sedgwick represents an eager sisterhood, with a ready, instinctive enthusiasm for all that is fine in literature and a quick recognition of pretence or shoddiness. Lord Snell is the earnest, inquiring young student of the 'nineties, reading to learn something of the conditions of the world around him even more than for the delight that books can give. Henry Nevinson is the man of culture combined with the man of action. Edward Burne-Jones is the sensitive, emotional reader, to whom books are sources of joy or of suffering rather than a means of intellectual satisfaction. Miss Berta Ruck stands for the omnivorous devourer of books, who is not too critical provided she finds something she can enjoy. These may stand as examples of readers whose recorded views have proved most helpful and interesting. Some information also may be obtained at second hand. Mr. H. G. Wells as a social historian is invaluable. He knows intimately one type of the impatient, ill-educated young rebel against social conditions, and records his (or her) attacks on books with gusto. Mr. E. F. Benson shows a section of fashionable society, pleasure-seeking and thoughtless, moved by each new craze or book as it comes along. Mrs. Humphry Ward presents a more intellectual circle, serious and politically minded, in which move the dignified figures of those who direct the affairs of the nation, and where books are recognized as among the greatest things of life; while Mr. Arnold Bennett gives the negative side of the picture and shows a society where books are almost unknown.

Yet with all these sources of information we have not found

what is the chief object of our search, the ordinary man. If we could find him, and learn what books he reads and exactly what are his reactions to them, we should learn something really valuable as to the influence of literature on the nation. But the ordinary man has eluded the historian throughout the ages and he continues to elude his contemporaries. It might be thought that, coming to one's own times, all difficulty would vanish; for here, as it must appear to most of us, is the ordinary person embodied in one's self, and here among one's friends and acquaintances are other ordinary persons with whose tastes and habits we are familiar and who are close at hand and ready to be interrogated. But before we have gone very far on this line of enquiry we realize our mistake. There is no such thing as a standardized person, though mass production in literature and in other things is doing its best to evolve one. This discovery has been made a hundred times, yet each fresh searcher feels something of a shock when he realizes that he must not presume to call himself an ordinary person since he cannot claim to represent this vast company of diverse personalities.

There is, however, a sense in which a writer can understand and perhaps present to others the relation of readers of his own generation to their books more truthfully and completely than any amount of research will enable him to understand and represent the relation of readers of any past age to theirs. Mr. Kenneth Grahame has spoken of the special "contemporary appeal" which all writers have for readers of their own time. "Perhaps I may also speak of it," he says, ". . . as the incommunicable thrill. Other thrills there are which may pass downwards through the centuries, but this particular one cannot be communicated by one generation to its successor. This thrill exists for its own generation alone." Because it exists for its own generation alone it unites those who have felt it in a more intimate fellowship than a common admiration of a great figure of the past, say of Shakespeare, could do, and in any attempt to tell the story of contemporary readers a writer may hope for its help.

CHAPTER II

BOOKS AND RELIGION

THE Victorian age is commonly derided as one in which bigotry and hypocrisy laid their sanctimonious hands on the religion of the nation and held it in utter subjection; yet in fact no age has done more towards giving religious freedom in thought and speech and practice. Darwin and his fellow scientists, with the authors of *Essays and Reviews*, and those who followed them in Biblical criticism, fought valiantly for the truth, and the truth, as always, made the people free. It is true that there were many who had no use for the new freedom; the great mass of professing Christians remained firm in what has been scornfully called a religion of convention but what was quite as often a simple, sincere and unquestioning faith. But a way had been made for those—and they were many—who wished to adventure on untrodden paths; so that when the eager young post-Victorians came to review the religious prospect they found a whole wide country laid open for their exploration. They found also many books written by the pioneers who were on ahead, and these they read with a detached interest which was never possible to the Victorians.

There were, first of all, the works of those who entirely rejected supernatural religion. There was the crude atheism of Colonel Ingersoll, who in America was a great power, but in England was chiefly popular among the less educated classes; Cardinal Manning and Mr. Gladstone read and denounced him; and Lord Snell, who admired him, said that the “one-sided controversy” between the “great American orator” and Mr. Gladstone was “a special delight.” Ingersoll’s best-known work was *The Mistakes of Moses*. He devoted himself chiefly to attacks on the Bible, which he regarded as “the enemy of human liberty, the greatest obstruction across the highway of human progress.” “Let me ask the ministers one question,” he said. “How can you be wicked enough to defend this book?” Unlike many professed unbelievers, Ingersoll did not respect the character of Christ as a man, but attacked and reviled Him as an unworthy demagogue. Ingersoll’s works were displayed in the shop windows of the poorer neighbourhoods of the great cities, alongside coarse and blasphemous

prints, parodies of the Lord's Prayer, and ribald songs to be sung to the tunes of well-known hymns. Mrs. Humphry Ward, in her book, *Robert Elsmere*, tells of a dingy little shop in East London, near the docks, "filled to overflowing with the coarsest free-thinking publications, Colonel Ingersoll's works occupying the place of honour in the window, and the *Freethinker* placard flaunting at the door." The placard appeared also pasted on walls and hoardings, and read:—

Read *Faith and Fools*. Enormous success. Our *Comic Life of Christ* now nearly completed. Quite the best thing of its kind going. Woodcut this week—Transfiguration.

A less ugly form of atheism was that professed by some earnest and intelligent men such as Charles Bradlaugh and the cream of his followers. They believed that Christianity was a mischievous delusion, which throughout the ages had hindered mankind in its progress towards better things, but they spoke with admiration of Christ and refrained from coarse abuse of the things that Christians held sacred. Of Bradlaugh, Lord Snell says:—

Taking him all in all—as man, as orator, as leader of unpopular causes, and as an incorruptible public figure—he was the most imposing human being that I had ever known.

Bradlaugh was not a writer of books, but his speeches and addresses were printed, and the stir that his opinions made caused him to be well known throughout the country. Miss Edna Lyall, in her two stories, *Donovan* (1882) and *We Two* (1884), gave a picture of an atheist leader of a fine and attractive type, and on May 18, 1887, Queen Victoria wrote to Randall Davidson, then Dean of Windsor:—

We have been (or indeed are still) reading that really beautiful book *We Two* (we read *Donovan* last year) and the Queen wishes to know if the character and life of Raeburn are not taken from some real atheist orator and leader. The Queen thought the Dean might know.

The Dean, apparently, did not suggest—as many people at the time were suggesting—that the character of Luke Raeburn was founded upon Charles Bradlaugh. He replied:—

I am extremely interested in the fact that Your Majesty should have enjoyed that most remarkable book, *We Two*. Considering how young the authoress is, she seems to me to have promise of the very highest order, and her books are already in immense circulation.

Miss Edna Lyall's exposition of the truths of Christianity given in these two books was neither learned nor very convincing. She appealed to the sentiment rather than to the intellect of her readers, but her picture of a high-minded, lovable atheist, sacrificing himself for what he believed to be the cause of humanity, led many of the stricter sort to broaden their views and regard less harshly those who differed from them in matters of religion.

The agnostics, less arrogant in their convictions than the atheists, declared themselves unable to accept the teaching of revelation, but refrained from pronouncing it untrue. "An agnostic," said Leslie Stephen, one of the most convinced members of this class of thinkers, "is one who asserts—what no one denies—that there are limits to the sphere of human intelligence. He asserts further

... that theology lies within the forbidden sphere." The term "agnostic" was first used by Thomas Huxley in 1869 to define his own position. He held that religion consisted in "reverence and love for the ethical ideal and the desire to realize that ideal in life." Huxley was not, perhaps, read by the young people of the 'nineties with the enthusiasm shown by some of their fathers and mothers thirty years before, when he had appeared as the mouth-piece of Darwin, the prophet of a new revelation shedding light into the dark places of doubt. But his rare gift of making scientific truths clear to unscientific minds and the lofty moral tone of his works kept a place for him among the philosophic writers of the day, and the *Lay Sermons* and the *Essays* were still widely read. When he died, in 1895, three lines from a poem written by his wife were, according to his own special direction, inscribed upon his tombstone:—

Be not afraid, ye waiting hearts that weep:
For still He giveth His beloved sleep,
And if an endless sleep He wills, so best.

The inscription caused something of a sensation at the time, and was taken as expressing Huxley's ultimate views on God and immortality; and Christians mourning over those they loved who

had died in the agnostic profession found comfort in them. Mr. H. G. Wells, in his *New Machiavelli*, tells of a wife whose creed scarcely allowed her to doubt that her unbelieving husband had been "flung headlong into hell"; and whose son found, after her death, a half-sheet of notepaper between the pages of her diary on which was written the verse in which the lines of Huxley's inscription occur. "That scrap of verse amazed me when I read it," says the son. "It set me thinking how far a mind in its general effect quite hopelessly limited, might range."

There were many other agnostic, or as they were more often called, rationalistic writers of the day, but most of these were too highly technical to be of much use to the ordinary reader. Leslie Stephen's *Essays on Freethinking and Plain Speaking* and his *An Agnostic's Apology* were among the few that appealed to any considerable portion of the public. But the rationalistic point of view was discussed in magazines and newspapers and sermons and so became familiar to readers all over the country. This led to a demand for "popular" books on the subject, and these were soon forthcoming. Godwin Peak, the embittered agnostic hero of George Gissing's *Born in Exile*, speaks scornfully of

that growing body of people who, for whatever reason, tend to agnosticism but desire to be convinced that agnosticism is respectable; they are eager for anti-dogmatic books written by men of mark. They couldn't endure to be classed with Bradlaugh, but they rank themselves confidently with Darwin and Huxley. Arguments matter little or nothing to them. They take their rationalism as they do a fashion in dress, anxious only that it shall be "good form."

Herbert Spencer, who was regarded as the leading teacher of philosophy of the day, was in some respects allied to the agnostics, but differed from them in recognizing a power which he called "the unknowable" working behind all human affairs. In 1860 he issued his *Programme of a System of Synthetic Philosophy*, and from that time to 1892 he published at intervals works expounding and developing his system. They were not popular books, and readers untrained in philosophic reasoning could gain little from them. Mary Gladstone read Spencer's *Sociology* and found it "very depressing," and Henry Arthur Jones considered his *Psychology* only less unintelligible than Browning's poetry. But the eager

young students of the 'nineties attacked him with vigour. Richard Remington, of H. G. Wells's *New Machiavelli*, read Spencer and disliked him; Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell "studied and made abstracts and notes of Spencer's *First Principles* and the *Principles of Biology*"; Lord Snell says, "Spencer's *First Principles* I read several times and at the end I even deluded myself I understood it. I also went very carefully through his *Sociology*." Spencer's books were much talked about so that his views became widely though vaguely known, and he too had a following.

One of the products of Agnosticism was Positivism, or the Religion of Humanity, founded upon the *Cours de Philosophie Positive* of Auguste Comte. This book had been made known in England chiefly through the condensed translation by Harriet Martineau, published in 1853, and works by G. H. Lewis and J. S. Mill which explained and discussed its principles. Positivism rejected all supernatural and metaphysical conceptions and in the place of God put Humanity. It set up a lofty ideal of service, and many people, saddened and discouraged by what seemed to them the destruction of the Christian faith, found in it comfort and fresh inspiration. George Eliot read Comte's works with delight. She thought Positivism one-sided, but declared nevertheless, "My gratitude increases continually for the illumination Comte has contributed to my life." Anne Douglas Sedgwick, the novelist-writer, found Comte amusing. "The basis of his appeal to Humanity for a united faith and object is so funny. Imagine any human being willing to live on his conditions! and imagine anybody finding inspiration in them!"

There were many people, however, to whom Positivism appeared neither illuminating nor amusing, but as a soul-destroying device all the more deadly because it had in it much that was noble and unselfish. Those who still held firmly to the truths of the Christian religion did their best to combat it. Towards the end of 1877 articles began to appear in the *Contemporary Review* and the *Nineteenth Century* under the title *Is Life Worth Living?* They were written by W. Hurrell Mallock, and dealt in detail with the philosophy of Positivism. The articles were widely read, and gave rise to a newspaper correspondence which went on and on until the starting-point was lost to sight, and representatives of almost every section of the British public had given their answers to the question *Is Life Worth Living?*

Mr. Mallock so far agreed with Miss Sedgwick as to maintain that Positivism offered no reward adequate to the effort it demanded. All that this world can offer, he argued, is too uncertain, alloyed and transitory to provide an object "sufficient to start the enthusiasm required by the Positivists . . . its only practical tendency is to deaden all our present interests, not to create new ones." All that gives dignity, beauty, and happiness to life, he maintained, comes through the worship and service of a Being felt to be all-powerful and all-loving.

Is every hope that has hitherto nerved our lives melting at last away from us utterly and for ever? Or are we indeed what we have been taught to think we are? Have we indeed some aims that we can still call high and holy?—still some aims that are more than transitory? And have we still some right to that reverence that we have learnt to cherish for ourselves?

Mr. Mallock had a large following and was read even by those who disagreed with him most strongly. In 1879 his articles were collected and published as a book, which circulated widely. He wrote also various novels and essays, all dealing with phases of Christian belief, and his works had considerable influence on religious thought. "You cannot read too much Mallock," wrote Ruskin to Miss Katherine Bradley (the aunt in the combination of aunt and niece that wrote under the name of Michael Field). "All he says is admirable and logical." On the other hand he was strongly opposed by those who held, as Thomas Huxley's son testified that his father had done, "a robust conviction that, all question of the future apart, this life as it can be lived, pain, sorrow, and evil notwithstanding, is worth—well worth, living."

For more scholarly readers there was Mr. A. J. Balfour's *Defence of Philosophic Doubt*, which appeared in 1879. This also argued against the philosophy of life that rejects the supernatural and requires certainty as a basis of belief. Its scope and purpose may be judged from its closing words:—

I cannot hope that my reasoning, even could I suppose it to be unanswerable, will produce any but a negative effect on those who approach the question of religious truth in that indifferent mood which they would perhaps themselves describe as intellectual impartiality. There may, however, be some of another temper, who would regard Religion as the most precious of all inheritances

—if only it were true; who surrender slowly and unwillingly to what they conceive to be unanswerable argument, convictions with which yet they can scarcely bear to part; who for the sake of Truth are prepared to give up what they had been wont to think of as their guide in this life, their hope in another, and to take refuge in some of the strange substitutes for Religion provided by the ingenuity of these latter times. It is not impossible that to some of these, hesitating between arguments to which they can find no reply, and a creed which they feel to be necessary, the line of thought suggested by this chapter may be of service. Should such prove to be the case, this Essay will have an interest and a utility beyond that of pure Speculation; and I shall be more than satisfied.

The *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* did not become a popular book. Minds untrained in philosophic principle found its argument beyond their understanding. But even to those who could not follow its reasoning its conclusion brought reassurance and comfort. The very fact that a man of great intellectual power who had given deep study to the subject should proclaim his belief in the Christian religion gave less highly equipped believers courage to withstand the attacks made upon it. "Arthur's opinions have not varied," said Lord Esher, speaking of a later book of Mr. Balfour's, *The Foundations of Belief*, published in 1894. "He was then" (at Cambridge, about 1866) "a Christian of a queer, undefined sort, and in that faith he has abided. He has done more—for he has justified philosophically his faith—an operation not common."

Popular reviewers dismissed *The Defence of Philosophic Doubt* airily as high-flown nonsense. "Mr. Balfour," said T. P. O'Connor, "can talk metaphysics by the hour; he has written some book—everybody talks about it, but nobody has read it—in which he is supposed to have taken on the mantle of Coleridge and proved conclusively that what the understanding can reject as the most arrant nonsense the reason may accept as the highest truth." But men who had themselves endeavoured to search out the truths of high philosophy accepted the book eagerly. W. G. Ward was delighted with it. "It put Newman's view" (expressed in *The Grammar of Assent*), "in another form," he said. "Both writers argued that general scepticism must result from the attempt to measure our practical beliefs by the ground we can produce for

them. Nothing is harder to justify theoretically than our very belief in an external world." Lord Esher held a similar view. "What is queer is," he said, "that there is a strong resemblance between a portion of Arthur's argument and that by which Dr. Newman was ultimately landed in the Romish Church."

To many people the materialist arguments of the Positivists seemed to be best met by Hegelism, the system founded upon the works of the German philosopher, George Hegel, who was often spoken of as the reconciler of religion and philosophy. Hegel's influence on English thinkers during the second half of the nineteenth century was strongly felt, and an English school of Hegelianism, or, as its upholders preferred to call it, Idealism, had been founded. One of the most influential of its teachers was Thomas Hill Green, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford. His influence came as much from the nobility of his life and his devotion to the service of the younger members of the university as from the doctrines he taught. In his lectures and in the *Prolegomena to Ethics*, which was published the year after his death in 1882, he upheld the main principles of Hegel, which he expounded with a wide sympathy and an intense moral fervour that made a strong appeal to those who, while rejecting Christ as a divinity, yet longed for a pure and lofty ideal of conduct, and a faith in something beyond and above themselves. These things they found in Hegelianism. "The outer world," Green taught, "is no independent existence, but a means through which man's own mind is ever more communicated to him, through which the deity, who works unseen behind it, pours the truth and love which transform his capabilities into realities."

Idealism became thus a religion as well as a philosophy, and many of its adherents began to dream of a Church purged of what was in their eyes an outworn creed, and teaching the pure doctrine that man is in himself divine and capable of reaching that highest perfection which was seen in the man, Christ Jesus. And thus the way for Modernism was prepared.

In 1882 appeared J. H. Shorthouse's *John Inglesant*, a "philosophical romance" of the mid-seventeenth century. Into a troubled and restless world it came like a quiet voice reminding men that there remained for those who would seek it an inner centre of peace untouched by the controversies that raged outside. The way by which that peace could be reached was told early in the book.

"There is nothing in the world of any value but the Divine Light—follow it," said young John Inglesant's tutor, the Anglican vicar of Ashley; and the story tells how John did follow it, not losing sight of it altogether even in the darkest days of those unhappy times. It is the story of a mystic, to whom the things of the spirit were the great realities of life, who though he lived in the midst of wars and tumults, meeting danger at every step, could yet testify that all who loved God might "without waiting for our mortal passage tread the free and spacious streets of that Jerusalem that is above." The centre of peace is typified in the book by the settlement of Little Gidding, lovingly and beautifully described. Nicholas Ferrar, a London merchant, bought, early in the reign of Charles I, the manor house of Little Gidding, in Huntingdonshire, and came to live there with his mother, brother, sister, nephews, nieces and dependants. They formed a small community, away from the strife and tumult which was raging in most parts of England—a community where life was lived simply, quietly and devoutly; where everybody worked, either at an art or craft, at household duties, or in ministering to the needs of the village; where the rites of the Anglican Church were performed with reverence and deep spiritual joy; and where a real attempt was made "to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

It was a vision of enchantment to many who in that unsettled time were distracted by the conflicting views set forward in the controversial books of the day; and there is small wonder that *John Inglesant* set some of its readers dreaming of founding a Little Gidding of their own, where they might find the happy peace that no longer seemed to exist in the world around them. On the other hand, there were some who pronounced the picture of Little Gidding—and *John Inglesant* as a whole—high-flown, tedious and unnatural. James Payn, to whom, as reader to Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., the manuscript had been sent, had reported it "unreadable"; and the readers of several other publishers had, in turn, given much the same verdict. It was not until a privately printed copy was shown to Mrs. Humphry Ward that a publisher willing to produce *John Inglesant* was found. She brought it to the notice of the firm of Macmillan, and there its value was recognized.

The book did not at once become generally popular, though

it gained a large circle of fervent admirers. The High Church party saw in it a noble exposition of the truths most dear to them. Charles Wood (afterwards Lord Halifax) was enraptured by it. Mr. Athelstan Riley, Edward Freeman the historian, Lord Acton, Bishop Westcott and Archbishop French praised it highly. Huxley, although he could not accept its religious teaching, read it with delight. Lady Cowper, wife of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, read it through three times, each time with increasing pleasure. Mary Gladstone discussed it eagerly with Ruskin. One admirer devoured the whole book "in a night of rapturous sympathy." Mr. Gladstone, then Prime Minister, was one of the most enthusiastic of *John Inglesant's* admirers. He talked about it everywhere and did much to spread its fame. When, in the same year that the book was published, he sat for a photograph which was to be on sale to the public, he held a volume of *John Inglesant* on his knee. The title was clearly to be read on each copy of the photograph, and curiosity and interest were aroused. The sales of the book increased. There were still some who regarded it as high-flown and unreal—who, as Edmund Gosse wrote to Robert Louis Stevenson, "stiffen the nape muscle against Shorthouse because he is beloved of deans and premiers"; but, on the whole, the Dean of Salisbury was not overstating the case when he told the author of *John Inglesant* that the book had taken London by storm.

Its popularity was not of the kind that quickly dies away when the first excitement is over. It remained as the treasured possession of many readers, and it kept for those who came to it later the same mystical attraction that it had had in the beginning. Hugh Benson, his brother has told us, read it in 1890, just before he went up to Cambridge.

He could long afterwards repeat many passages by heart, and he says that a half-mystical, half-emotional devotion to the person of Our Lord which he derived from the book seemed to him to focus and concentrate all his vague religious emotions.

When he left Cambridge and went to read for Orders with Dean Vaughan, at Llandaff, he read the book again, and wandered about the countryside looking for a place where a community such as that of Little Gidding might be established.

But the book which made the greatest sensation—which was

indeed accepted by many people as representing and interpreting an entire school of religious thought—was Mrs. Humphry Ward's novel, *Robert Elsmere*. It told the story of a young and enthusiastic Church of England clergyman, and of his wife, Catherine, whose faith was as fervent as his own, and more austere and uncompromising. The two went to live in Robert's Surrey parish, and for a time were very happy giving devoted service to their people. Then came the Squire of the village, a brilliant scholar and an unbeliever, and suggested doubts to Robert, at the same time making the young man free of his splendid library. Robert, whose fine and eager intellect had been a little starved in his devotion to parish work, listened, read—and doubted; and, after an agonizing struggle, gave up his faith in the Bible as an inspired book and his belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ. "Miracles do not happen." He resigned his living, and went with his heart-broken wife to London, where he attempted to establish a Brotherhood founded on the faith that he now held, but died of overwork in the midst of the struggle.

Mrs. Humphry Ward was a woman of exceptional learning, with a deep sense of religion and a passionate attachment to the cause of modernism. The creed which she held is summed up in the words which she puts into the mouth of Elsmere's Oxford tutor, Mr. Grey, to whom he goes for advice in his difficulties, and who, admittedly, stands for T. H. Green:—

God is in criticism, in science, in doubt, so long as the doubt is pure and honest doubt as yours is. He is in all life, in all thought. The thought of man, as it has shaped itself in institutions, in philosophies, in science, in patient critical work, or in the life of charity is the one continuous revelation of God. Look for Him in it all; see how, little by little, the divine indwelling force, using as its tools—but *merely* as its tools—man's physical appetites and conditions, has built up conscience and the moral life; think how every faculty of the mind has been trained to take its part in the great work of faith upon the visible world. Love and imagination built up religion—shall reason destroy it? No! reason is God's like the rest. Trust it, trust Him. The leading strings of the past are dropping from you, they are dropping from the world, not wantonly or by chance but in the providence of God. . . . Learn to seek God not in any single event of past history *but in your own soul*—in the constant verifications of experience, in the life of Christian love.

Robert Elsmere was published on February 24, 1888. For a few days it passed almost unnoticed. Most of the papers and magazines reviewed it, but with no signs of special excitement. The *Athenæum* was perhaps typical. Under the heading of "Novels of the Week," it placed *Robert Elsmere* first on a list of five and gave it about a column and a half of criticism. "Having a great deal to say and exceptional ability for saying it," the review began, "Mrs. Humphry Ward no doubt chose the novel for the form of her work as being that which would best attract the attention of those she wished to reach." But as a novel the reviewer found little in the work to praise. It was chiefly interesting, he said, because it dealt with "the burning questions between the old faith and the new Christianity."

This suggestion sufficed to make many readers eager to get the book and those who read it quickly caught fire. They discussed it with their friends, and the excitement grew. The book was considered not primarily as a story, but as a highly controversial religious tract. "It has considerable merit, but its success is really due to its saying what everybody else is thinking," wrote Benjamin Jowett to Margaret Tennant. In a few weeks it seemed as if everyone was reading *Robert Elsmere*. Matthew Arnold, the author's uncle, took it with him when he went to join Lord Pembroke's house party at Wilton in March, and found that most of the other guests had done the same. "I found Lady Charles Beresford enthralled by *Robert Elsmere*, tell Mary," he wrote to his sister, "and Lady Hilda Brodrick has promised to introduce her to Mary. Goschen has read only one volume yet." Mr. George Russell was among the guests and he brought news of having met Mr. Gladstone at another country house; the old statesman, then nearly eighty years old, was, he said, full of the book, could talk of nothing else. Early in April Mr. Gladstone wrote to his daughter Mrs. Drew—"Mamma and I are still each of us separately engaged in a death-grapple with *Robert Elsmere*"; and to Lord Acton, "It is not far from twice the length of an ordinary novel; and the labour and effort of reading it all, I should say, sixfold; while one could no more stop in it than in reading Thucydides." Mr. Knowles, the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, was urging him to write a review of the book. For some weeks he could not make up his mind to undertake such an exacting piece of work; the thought of it, he told his daughter, filled him with doubt and dread; but at length he set himself to the task, and wrote "*Robert Elsmere*

and the Battle of Beliefs." It was a long and weighty article, filling twenty-two pages of the May number of the *Nineteenth Century*, and it treated the book with the utmost seriousness. Little was said about its merits as a novel, but that little showed that Mr. Gladstone did not rate *Robert Elsmere* very high. Most of the space was given to the discussion of the religious questions involved. "*Robert Elsmere*," said Mr. Gladstone, "is hard reading and requires toil and effort." It is "eminently an offspring of the times and will make a deep or at least a very sensible impression, not, however, among mere novel-readers but among those who share, in whatever sense, the deeper thought of the period." But its treatment of the situation on which the story turns was, Mr. Gladstone said, feeble and unconvincing. Robert Elsmere, the young clergyman, is presented as a man of intelligence and scholarship as well as of fervent faith. Yet he makes no fight against the insidious attacks on that faith by the unbelieving Squire Wendover. It is true that the Squire's learning is deeper and wider than his own, but there were many great men on his side whom he might have called to his support. There can be, said Mr. Gladstone, no claim that the case has been fairly presented when "a great creed with the testimony of eighteen centuries at its back cannot find an articulate word to say in its defence." He charged Mrs. Ward with having presented only one side of the argument, and of having attempted to undermine the Christian faith while shirking the real issue.

All readers who had made any study of Christian evidence were in full agreement with Mr. Gladstone. Professor James Stuart said that Mrs. Ward never seemed even to have comprehended the problem she was dealing with. "I have marked passage after passage," he said, "in which she misses the point, till the little row of figures giving the pages which I have marked, on the fly-leaf, has run all from the top to the bottom of the page." Canon Barnett read Gladstone's review in the train. "He gets the better of the argument, and with a power of words tramples on the inadequacy of Mrs. Ward's position," was his conclusion. Many ordinary readers of intelligence had been conscious of a one-sidedness in the argument, and now that Mr. Gladstone had pointed it out it became clear to many more. His review did much to increase the sale of the book—already in its third edition. The very fact that a man of such eminence had treated it as a work of real importance

made everyone feel that not to have read it was an acknowledgment of intellectual inferiority.

Very soon there was a rush for *Robert Elsmere* at the circulating libraries. There is a story of a lady who, having just taken her seat in a train at Waterloo, was seen to wave a green volume and exclaim triumphantly to the friend who was seeing her off, "I've got it! I've got it! They told me no chance for weeks—not the slightest. Then just as I was standing at the counter who should come up but somebody bringing back the first volume. Of course it was promised to somebody else, but as I was there I laid hands on it, and here it is," and as the train started she settled down to the enjoyment of *Robert Elsmere*. A traveller in London reported that he had seen twelve copies in the hands of the passengers in one omnibus. Before the end of July a one-volume edition of the book was published, and of this five thousand copies a fortnight were sold for many months.

At Oxford, where Mrs. Ward was well known, *Robert Elsmere* was the great object of interest all through the summer of 1888. University society occupied itself in guesses as to the originals of the characters in the book. Mr. Grey was easily identified as T. H. Green, the Squire, on his scholarly side, was Mark Pattison, the late Rector of Lincoln College, Langham was the French writer, Amiel. As to Catherine, the Oxford ladies could find no one to cite as her prototype, and only Mrs. Ward's most intimate friends recognized that she was a composite portrait of various members of the author's family.

Wilfrid Ward declared that the one thing that consoled him for being, as a Roman Catholic, shut out from Oxford was that he had been kept free from the "horrid sentimental emotionalism in religion" that was in the air there, and which he hated. Robert Browning, an old man now and very near his end, detested *Robert Elsmere*; he entirely disagreed with its main argument. Burne-Jones told Mrs. Ward that he never should have believed that he could have devoured a book about parsons, since what he really liked was a pirate hero; and Andrew Lang apologized for his want of enthusiasm concerning it by saying that it was not his sort, to please him a story must have a ghost, a murder, a duel, and some savages. Lang wrote an article on "Theological Romances" for the June number of the *Contemporary Review*. He hated the whole species, he said and never read one if he could help it. By "very

considerable exertions I managed to avoid the perusal of *John Inglesant*; as the Scotch proverb advises, I ‘jouked and let the Jaw go by.’” But he had read *Robert Elsmere* and wished he hadn’t. He had found it uninspiring. Catherine he considered “a very dull woman,” and as to her younger sister, Rose, “culture was too much with her.” Huxley, on the other hand, wrote to Mrs. Ward that he considered Catherine “the gem of the book—she reminds me of her namesake of Siena.” He thought Mrs. Ward’s picture of “one of the deeper aspects of our troubled times” admirable but he complained that she had been “very hard on the philosophers.” “I do not know whether Langham or the Squire is more unpleasant—but I have a great deal of sympathy with the latter so I hope he is not the worst.”

The feeling aroused by the book among the general reading public was, on the whole, hostile and indignant. In many cases, doubtless, this was due merely to outraged prejudice, in others from a desire to be in the fashion. But there remained a body of readers who were deeply and sincerely moved by the book, and who felt, as Mr. Gladstone had felt, that it was their plain if painful duty to speak their minds about it. The clamour that arose was thus loud, and pitched in various keys. Sermons were preached about *Robert Elsmere*, and congregations thrilled as they listened. Letters violently condemning it were written to the papers, and were answered by others upholding it with equal violence. It was discussed at dinner parties and assemblies, where guests grew heated and almost quarrelsome as the argument went on. Literary societies studied it and wrote papers on it. It was called a work of the devil, it was hailed as a divinely inspired oracle. Stopford Brooke, who, as a Unitarian, agreed with the book’s main argument, wrote to Mrs. Ward, “Of course you stand between two fires, between the orthodox, like Gladstone . . . and the—what shall I call them, their sects are legion, Agnostics, Spencerians, Mallockians, Materialists, Atheists, Positivists whose cue it is to say that if the supernatural be taken away from Christianity, Christianity has no existence. . . . Well, the world has congratulated you on the book and I am delighted that it has seen so clearly what is good and fair.”

To the sects named by Mr. Stopford Brooke there had now been added another whose creed was “Elsmerism” and this sect was soon actively engaged in seeking a means by which its belief

could be made operative. Its members desired to found a Brotherhood on the lines of that described in *Robert Elsmere*, and with the generous help of Mr. Passmore Edwards the Passmore Edwards Settlement (afterwards called the Mary Ward Settlement) was established.

The summer waned, but Elsmerism showed no signs of falling with the fall of the year, and it was probably this continued popularity which brought into the field another champion of the orthodox faith, Dean Wace. He would, he said, have dealt with the book earlier but he had been "busy with agnostic abominations." He advanced to the attack with none of the painful reluctance felt by Mr. Gladstone, only eager to smite the enemy and win a victory for the faith. "The success of this novel," he began, in an article in the October number of the *Quarterly*, "is the most interesting, and in some respects the most instructive literary event of the present year." He rated its artistic qualities higher than most of the critics had done, but its religion and its philosophy he declared to be unworthy of serious consideration. Mrs. Ward, he said contemptuously, presented a phase of religious thought that had long ago been lived through and was practically dead. She was obviously quite unfitted for the task she had set herself. She was unaware of the fuller developments that had answered the questions she had raised; and he quoted, as explaining the outworn nature of her argument, the saying, "Oxford is the place to which good German philosophers go when they die."

Next followed Randall Davidson, then Dean of Windsor, with an article entitled "Religious Novels" in the November number of the *Contemporary Review*. He did not, he said, condemn the novel as a means of teaching religion. "There are passages in *Adam Bede*, *The Minister's Wooing*, *Alec Forbes*, *Yeast*, even in *Donovan* and *We Two* which have left their mark for abiding good upon the religious life of hundreds of men and women of to-day." But he did not think that *Robert Elsmere* could be classed with these. It was one-sided, and therefore unfair. Mr. Gladstone, said the Dean, had pointed out that there was no evidence that Mrs. Ward had examined the arguments of those who upheld the Christian faith. He would go farther and say that there was every evidence she had not.

The only person who had not read *Robert Elsmere* seems to have been Mr. A. J. Balfour. Lady Frances Balfour says that at

the time when everybody was talking about the book its author came as a guest to Whittingehame and the family was deeply concerned as to how this lamentable sin of omission could be concealed from her. But Mr. Balfour showed himself equal to the situation. At dinner he cleverly and unobtrusively directed the conversation to the subject of East Lothian Agriculture. "As the Laird discoursed on turnips and potatoes, he who did not usually know the one from the other, or a plough from a harrow, we noticed that he ploughed that furrow straight and avoided the crucial test."

For at least another year the rage for *Robert Elsmere* lasted. Then it gradually died down and in a few years the book was almost forgotten except by those who had read it in their youth and who, while they failed, perhaps, to follow its main argument, had been deeply impressed by its moral earnestness and its passionate concern with the things of the spirit. In all that has been said and written about it, the words of Dean Church—who still kept the large and clear outlook that had guided him in the Darwinian controversy thirty years before—are perhaps the wisest and most memorable. Lady Welby had written to him telling him of a paper she had read to a clerical society on "How far is the impression made by *Robert Elsmere* and the extent of its circulation due to any failure on the part of Christians and teachers." In reply the Dean said that he could not answer this question, but was willing to accept its implication as a spur to further effort, and he went on:—

Polemics are in the air, in novels, newspapers and magazines. . . . But I venture to think we shall find much virtue one day in patience. Patience does not mean inaction, and not talking does not mean not thinking. Without being a sceptic or an agnostic one may feel that there are questions in the world that will never be answered on this side the grave, perhaps not on the other. It was the saying of an old Greek, in the very dawn of thought, that men would meet with many surprises when they were dead. Perhaps one will be the recollection that when we were here we thought the ways of Almighty God so easy to argue about.

But there were others as single-minded and devout as Richard Church who did not feel that the patience which he advocated was the only duty of the believer in face of the attacks that were being made upon the faith, and who longed to strike a blow in its

defence. A company of such enthusiasts—"a gang of young Donlets," as Henry Scott Holland called them—was assembled at Oxford in the late eighteen seventies. Among them Scott Holland was the moving spirit. Henry Nevinson, who, as an undergraduate came under Holland's influence, says that "his service lay in arousing the Church to an enthusiasm not inspired by fear . . . but a joyful exhilaration of spirit such as a young man or woman of perfect health and sanity may feel in starting out on an adventure on a fine summer morning." It was in such a spirit of joyful exhilaration that these young Anglicans entered upon the close study of those doctrines of the Church which science seemed to be attacking. Every year this Holy Party, as Holland had ironically named it, spent a month of the summer vacation in a country parish where the incumbent was on holiday, taking his duties, reading, studying, praying, and for the rest endlessly discussing those religious questions of the day in which they were most keenly interested. As a result the party (made up of Scott Holland, J. R. Illingworth, Francis Paget, and two others, with, later, Charles Gore) resolved to write a book in which they would "try to put the Catholic faith in its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems." It was not until 1887 that the book was actually taken in hand, and it appeared in the autumn of 1889 in the form of a collection of essays called *Lux Mundi*. Among Churchmen it raised a great outcry. More especially the essay on the Holy Ghost and Inspiration, by Charles Gore, then Head of Pusey House, was fiercely attacked. In it Gore accepted most of the conclusions arrived at by the critics of the text of the Old Testament, and strove to show that these did not affect the essential truths of the Christian faith. But in this many Churchmen could not follow him. The essay, says Bishop Nash, startled even very good men. Henry Parry Liddon, Canon of St. Paul's, leader of the Anglo-Catholic party to which the authors of *Lux Mundi* belonged, was dismayed and distressed by it beyond measure. To him it seemed impossible that a Christian should assent to criticism of the Old Testament which claimed to have proved that its text was in many places fallible and uninspired, and yet believe in the infallibility of Jesus Christ who had quoted from it and spoken of it as the Word of God. He denounced the book in his sermons and writings; many of his friends said that it had broken his heart. Gore, who was one of his closest friends and loved him,

dearly felt deep distress. He had feared Liddon's disagreement from the first, and had written to him when the book appeared, attempting to make his position clear. "I think I should almost die of it if it did harm. . . . If you seriously disapprove it would be a great misery." Liddon did seriously disapprove, and continued passionately to make his disapproval known. His health had for some time been failing, but he felt that this was no time to rest when the Church was beset by foes inside her own fold. On Whit Sunday, 1890, he preached his last sermon at St. Mary's, Oxford, and in it he stated with impressive finality the conclusions at which, after months of painful thinking, he had arrived. In September of that same year he died.

A large number of clergy followed Liddon in his denunciation of *Lux Mundi*. Many went beyond him in violence. Archdeacon Denison, of Taunton, who had been prominent in the Darwinian controversy, was now equally bitter against what he called "the Gorian heresy," and declared Gore to be "the most dangerous man I have lived to see." In February 1890 the Archdeacon, then eighty-six years old, made a passionate speech in the Lower House of Convocation, asking that a committee should be appointed to examine *Lux Mundi* and report as to whether they considered it heretical and dangerous. "From the first day that I took the book, *Lux Mundi*, into my hands," he said, "now more than a year ago I have never been without the keenest sense of the special danger of it to 'all sorts and conditions of men'—to the few that are 'learned,' to the millions that are not 'learned,' and must perforce continue all their lives in that condition." Randall Davidson opposed Denison's motion, and it was lost, but the outcry against *Lux Mundi* continued; Father Ignatius of Llanthony conducted a violent campaign against it. He hired a hall at Oxford, and Gore, as he went on his daily way about the town, was met everywhere by posters proclaiming that a meeting would be held for the purpose of denouncing "the man Charles Gore." At the meeting Father Ignatius spoke with eloquence and passion, but he did not succeed in taking Gore's following from him. Many of the undergraduates were his personal friends, and had learned to love and admire him, and to those who had been wavering between attachment to the old faith and conviction by the new science, *Lux Mundi* had come as a potent reconciler, satisfying both their intellects and their hearts.

The Evangelical clergy as a body were in disagreement with *Lux Mundi*, though they made no violent demonstration against it. The Reverend E. A. Knox, then Rector of Kilworth, says that many of them took the book less seriously than they should have done. They knew that recent criticism had attacked the inerrancy of the Scriptures, and that prominent theologians, like Bishop Westcott, had accepted many of its conclusions. "But neither I nor my brother incumbents," he said, "still less the ordinary church laity were as yet moved from the traditional belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. . . . On the other hand, I think we were so far sensible of the difficulty that we laid increased stress on the devotional use of Scripture." They took the teaching of Dean Vaughan, Master of the Temple, as their model, avoided speculation and concentrated on the practical value of the Scriptures as a guide to holiness of life.

Newman read *Lux Mundi* in the peace of his quiet room at Edgbaston Oratory, and though he thought it too liberal he did not utterly condemn it. His long life had taught him many things, and he recognized the book as the fruit of just such a struggle to reach a new spiritual standpoint as he himself had passed through more than fifty years before. What the Church urgently needed, he told Wilfrid Ward, who often came to visit the old Cardinal in his seclusion, was "a frank recognition of the sober conclusions of Biblical science, and a view of Biblical inspiration compatible with complete frankness as to facts." Ward himself was not greatly moved by the book. He thought there were "striking bits" in Scott Holland's essay on "Faith," but it was far too rationalistic, and it had a touch of the "disgusting Elsmere gush" that he hated.

The public in general was less agitated over *Lux Mundi* than it had been over *Robert Elsmere*. Only that comparatively small body of the laity that was really interested in questions of theology gave it serious consideration. The attitude of a considerable section—those who had not read the book but had formed their opinion from newspaper comments and the vague rumours that were going about—was that of the old lady who complained to Father Bickersteth of "that awful Canon Gore who doesn't believe the Bible." Gore said that many people wrote letters of gratitude to him, while those who wrote letters of complaint addressed them to others or to the newspapers. Often the book was classed with *Robert Elsmere*, though the one denied the

divinity of Christ and the other asserted it with passion. News of the Modernist movement then beginning in the Roman Church was spreading, and those who gave little study to the subject classed all departures from the long established views on religion as "Modernist."

On the whole *Lux Mundi* made far more sensation than its authors had expected. In October 1890 Scott Holland wrote to Bishop Coplestone, thanking him for his kindness towards "us poor Luxites."

Poor old book! I look at it and wonder. I thought it so dreadfully heavy and dull when I first read it. I never thought that we should induce anyone to read it outside the circle of our aunts and mothers and a few patient-minded clergy. The old book looked conscious of its own dead weight and never dreamt of this stormy and excited career. . . . We ourselves seemed to ourselves to have been saying these things for years and to have heard everybody else saying them. Now suddenly we find it all spoken of as a bomb, as a New Oxford Movement, etc. etc.

These were the books that the young readers of the 'nineties found waiting for them when they came, joyfully claiming their newly asserted freedom to read what they liked, to explore the ways of God and men. All were examined with eager curiosity; some were read and studied, others neglected as unhelpful. *Robert Elsmere* received from them no such serious consideration as had been accorded to it by their elders. They read with interest Mrs. Ward's later novels, which dealt with social subjects, but as the 'nineties went on her influence rapidly waned. By 1900 she had become, says Mr. Swinnerton, an occasion for "ribald comment," though Miss Vera Brittain tells how, some years later, she read Mrs. Ward's "deistic tract" and was converted by it from "an unquestioning if somewhat indifferent churchgoer to an anxiously interrogative agnostic." Mr. Robert Hichens made fun of Mrs. Ward in his amusing travesty of the movements of the day, *The Green Carnation* published in 1894.

They say that Mrs. Humphry Ward actually converted one of the Canons of Canterbury to a belief in the Thirty-nine Articles after he had preached against them and miracles in the cathedral. I am certain that Mrs. Humphry Ward is the most orthodox Christian whom we have. Otherwise her books against the accepted

Christianity could never have brought her in so many thousand pounds. I never read her, of course. Life is far too long and lovely for that kind of thing; but a bishop once told me that if she had a sense of humour she would rival George Eliot.

Lux Mundi the younger generation received with greater respect. For them as for their elders it became the main influence guiding the course of religious thought. The question as to how much of the modern teaching an honest man might accept and yet keep his place in the ministry of the Church had been a burning one ever since the days of *Essays and Reviews*. *Lux Mundi* was now generally accepted as an answer, though there were some who claimed a freedom beyond that which it allowed, and many, especially among the older clergy, who rejected it with horror. Mr. Hugh Walpole, in his novel, *The Cathedral*, which opens in 1896, shows a state of things such as existed in many places all over the country—a body of clergy strongly, even bitterly divided. Archdeacon Brandon led the party that upheld the old views and Canon Ronder was the champion of the new. The struggle culminated in a contest concerning the filling of a vacant living in the gift of the chapter. Ronder's party won, and triumphantly introduced a young ultra-Modernist who had written a book, *The New Apocalypse*, which his opponents declared heretical and blasphemous. Such feuds affected congregations as well as clergy and where they came peace and goodwill vanished. The 'nineties were troubled days for the Church while the new teaching was making its way and young intolerance fought with old bigotry.

In the Nonconformist ministry also the new ideas were gaining acceptance. John Oliver Hobbes, in her novel, *The Dream and the Business*, which treats of about the same period as *The Cathedral*, shows an eminent Nonconformist, who is also a judge of the Queen's Bench, trying to overcome the scruples of his nephew who is hesitating as to whether he shall become a congregational minister. "No one nowadays is expected to preach the Garden of Eden and Jonah, and the Ark and the Miracles—beyond their symbolical significance."

In *A Londoner's Log Book* Mr. G. W. E. Russell caricatured those clergymen who, without real conviction, posed as advanced and daring thinkers. He described, in the first person, life in an eminently genteel suburban parish during the years 1901 and 1902. The vicar of the parish, the Reverend Lancelot Ludovic Soulsby,

was, or wished to be thought, a modern of the moderns. He had graduated from King's College, Cambridge, "by way of an Aegrotat in Botany," and his greatest ambition was to keep abreast of the latest thinking in all matters of culture and religion. "It was rumoured in the parish that the smoking flax of his faith was nearly quenched by *Robert Elsmere*, but quickened into fresh life by the opportune publication of *Lux Mundi*." Henceforward he became an ardent apostle of what he called the Deep Church, which apparently drew its inspiration from founts which reached down to depths where the secular and the religious were as one. "Last Advent he held us spellbound with a course of lectures on *The Theological Aspects of Mr. Swinburne's Poetry* and his Christmas sermon on *The Master Christian* was found by the ladies of his flock to be 'very teaching.'"

In 1912, twenty-four years after the appearance of *Robert Elsmere*, Mrs. Ward published another religious novel called *The Case of Richard Meynell*. In this the clergyman hero held the views of Robert Elsmere, developed and matured. But instead of feeling called upon to leave the ministry of the Church he claimed the right to remain within it, to teach the creed which he professed and to practise a mode of worship in accordance with that creed. He gained a large following and was so far successful in his aims that a great service was held at one of the most famous English cathedrals, at which the bishop was present with three hundred Modernist clergymen, and Richard Meynell preached to an immense congregation of men and women all burning with zeal for Modernism.

Richard Meynell made little impression on the reading public. It passed almost unnoticed among the crowd of novels of its day. Those who remembered the storm that had greeted *Robert Elsmere* were struck by the change, but, on reflection, found little difficulty in accounting for it. Mrs. Ward was here out of touch with the realities of the age. There was no such zeal for Modernism as she described. Opinion had settled. Men had taken their stand, and no longer wavered to and fro. Some had entirely rejected Christianity, some still held in every detail to the faith of their fathers. But to those Christians who had been willing to believe that, as they had been told in *Lux Mundi*, "the real development of theology is the process in which the Church, standing firm in her old truths, enters the apprehension of the new social and

intellectual movements of each age," a new way had been made clear; a way in which they could walk without turning their backs on either religion or science. In pointing out this way books had taken a not unimportant part. Even infidel and sectarian books had helped by forcing professing Christians to examine into the reality of their faith. Of *Lux Mundi* J. H. Shorthouse had said,

An original and great book—a book destined to live and struggle through light and shade, through good report and evil report, through misunderstanding and misconception, and to be healthful and strengthening through the long years to come; an original book, striking a fresh note in religious thought, however true to the old lines.

CHAPTER III

THE DECADENTS OF THE 'NINETIES

WHEN the 'nineties opened the crusade in the cause of Beauty which had begun with *Modern Painters* forty-seven years before was languishing, some said extinct. Some of its old leaders were dead, and those who remained were inactive. Ruskin was living in sad retirement at Brantwood, his body enfeebled, his vision clouded. Swinburne was no longer the daring rebel who had dashed into the fray wielding his strange, shining weapon, *Poems and Ballads*, but a staid little poet, obedient to the conventions in his life and in his work. Pater was still writing with his old unhastening care his exquisite artificial prose, but the novelty of his views had passed, and his following, though enthusiastic, was small. The aesthetic cult inaugurated by Oscar Wilde had died, or was quickly dying of its own excesses, and Wilde himself had entered on a new phase; the "greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery young man" was no more.

Yet these old leaders still had their influence. They had, as it were, settled a little colony in the enemy country and peaceful penetration was carrying on the work that open warfare had begun. Meantime a fresh company of declared Beauty lovers was forming. This company did not proclaim a crusade; it aimed rather at shocking the Philistine than at enlightening him. With a kind of languid scorn it drew itself away from the common man, declining to be bound by any of his principles or conventions. It spent an immense febrile energy in producing works of art which it was proudly conscious would be appreciated only by the elect, and it received (or affected to receive) the indignant protests of flouted respectability as a flattering tribute to its pre-eminence. It was a small company and the noise it made was altogether out of proportion to its numbers. Most of its leaders were young and several of them had a touch of that morbidity that comes with physical weakness and the shadow of early decay.

Looking back upon the ferment caused by these young "decadents," when its last faint stirrings had died away, historians have been inclined to see in George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*, published in 1886, the original impulse that set it

working. The *Confessions* give an account of the author's life in Paris, where he studied painting, and wrote stories and articles for which he tried, not very successfully, to find a publisher. He had, however, a sufficient income for his needs, and he was able to live as he pleased, without regard to conventions or morality. Yet he found that these still had weight with the general public, and he complained bitterly of their influence. "Respectability," he said, "continues to exert a meretricious and enervating influence on literature. All audacity of thought and expression has been stamped out, and the conventionalities are rigorously respected. . . . Respectability has wound itself about society, a sort of octopus, and nowhere are you free from one of its horrible suckers."

Foreign influences also were at work stimulating the decadent cult. The works of a group of French writers, themselves known as the *Décadents*, had been eagerly read by a certain section of the English public ever since Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* had become known here during the early 'sixties. It had become the treasure, almost the text-book, of the young men who believed themselves to be engaged in rescuing Art from the stranglehold of Respectability. Verlaine's poems came later, with their shameless glorification of the things that most men called evil, and the strange charm of their verse, sometimes of a sensuous beauty, often rough and almost formless. To the young Decadents of England, reading the works of these writers and other members of the group, it seemed that their own efforts were, in comparison, checked and restricted to the extent of stultification, and they proclaimed their defiance of these conditions to a shocked but not deeply interested world.

From Germany were arriving the works of Nietzsche, and England was being introduced to the famous conception of the Superman. To the general public this marvellous being became known chiefly through chance references and newspaper comment, and they regarded him as an amusing novelty and an admirable subject for mockery. The arrogant young disciples of the new cult, however, readily assimilated Nietzsche's gospel. "All Gods are dead; now we will that the Superman shall live." "Everyone should create his own truth and morals for himself; what is good or bad, useful or harmful for one man is not necessarily so for another." "The misery of the men who struggle painfully through life must be increased to allow a small number of Olympic geniuses to produce works of art." To these and other pronounce-

ments of the German philosopher they gave a willing assent; his views were in complete accordance with their own. "Oscar Wilde was a sort of Nietzsche," says M. A. Mügge, in his *Friederich Nietzsche*, "for his philosophy was also that of an aristocrat, and he praised instinct." W. E. Henley, too, Mügge claims, preached the gospel of the Superman, notably in his poem, "Out of the night that covers me"; and foremost of all he places Bernard Shaw, "a Nietzsche become dramatist and full of English common sense." It was Shaw indeed who did most towards making the Superman idea known in England through his play, *Man and Superman*, but that was not until 1903.

Four years after the *Confessions of a Young Man*, the first work definitely representing the new school was produced by Oscar Wilde. Wilde was now thirty-seven years old and was growing stout and middle-aged. He had married a wealthy wife, and lived in a fine house, and he went about London no more as a long-haired, exotically garbed poet, but as a gentleman of fashion clad in the masterpieces of an expensive tailor. He had undergone an intellectual transformation also and instead of producing clever imitative verses was starting upon that period of brilliant creative work that was to astonish those who had looked upon him merely as a skilful poser. During 1890 his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared in *Lippincott's Magazine*, and it was published, considerably enlarged, in book form in 1891. By it the British reading public received the first of those shocks which the apostles of the new cult were destined to give it. Nothing at all like *Dorian Gray* had ever been presented to its notice. It is true there had been many books in which morality had been flouted and wrong-doing upheld, but there had been at least a tacit acknowledgment that righteousness and morality were good in themselves, and to be held in honour; on the whole the old distinctions between virtue and vice still held. The Oscar Wilde aesthetes of the 'eighties had in a feeble and ineffectual manner attempted to glorify sin, but the public had been amused rather than scandalized at their efforts. But in *Dorian Gray* was set out a definite code from which morality had disappeared. "A new Hedonism—that is what our century wants," said Lord Henry Wotton, one of the characters, in whom readers believed that they recognized Wilde himself, and in *Dorian Gray* the principles of this new Hedonism were fully stated. "The artist is the creator of beautiful things," said the

Preface. "Vice and virtue are to the artist material for his art." "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all." Throughout the story itself the same doctrine is preached, chiefly by the mouth of Lord Henry Wotton. "The aim of life is self-development." "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." "Sin is the only real colour element left in modern life." The book with its mixture of the voluptuous and the horrible, the beautiful and the ugly, with its wit and charm and shamelessness was a fitting manifesto of the decadent school whose advent it announced.

The first few instalments of *Dorian Gray* passed comparatively unnoticed. Oscar Wilde's followers had dwindled and his name no longer aroused any very great interest even among his mockers. Then the reviews began to appear and shocked the general public into attention. The *St. James's Gazette* had a long article headed "A Study in Puppydom."

Not being curious in ordure, and not wishing to offend the nostrils of decent persons we do not propose to analyse *Dorian Gray*; that would be to advertise the developments of an esoteric prudence and craving for notoriety which he once earned by talking fiddle-faddle about other men's Art . . . The writer airs his cheap research among the garbage of the French *Décadents* like any drivelling pedant, and he bores you unmercifully with his prosy rigmaroles about the Beauty of the Body and the Corruption of the Soul.

Oscar Wilde in reply wrote an angry letter which was inserted in the next issue of the paper. He accused the reviewer of libel for having said that his book was dangerous, but his charge was met in a way that made him more angry still. "That this story is corrupt cannot be denied," wrote his critic, "but we added and assuredly believe that it is not dangerous because, as we said, it is tedious and stupid." To be tedious and stupid was in the eyes of the Oscar Wilde set far worse than to be wicked, and their disgust increased as other papers repeated the charge. "The book is unmanly, sickening and vicious (though not exactly what is called improper) and tedious," said the *Athenaeum*, and the *Daily Chronicle* began a long review by summing up the book as consisting of "dirt and dullness." Oscar Wilde wrote again. "My story is an essay in decorative art," he declared, "it reacts against the crude brutality of plain realism. It is poisonous, if you like,

but you cannot deny that it is also perfect, and perfection is what we artists aim at." But he was quite unable to still or even to allay the storm that he had raised. Only a very few critics found any merit at all in his book. *Lippincott's* naturally praised it, calling it the drama of a human soul, and comparing it to *John Inglesant* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Walter Pater in the *Bookman* said, "Mr. Wilde's work may fairly claim to go with that of E. A. Poe." *Punch* credited the book with an "ingenious idea," but said that as far as anything else was concerned it was best forgotten. Its cartoon, after Dickens, showing Oscar Wilde as the Fat Boy addressing a horrified Mrs. Grundy with the words "I want to make your flesh creep," was really quite a fair representation of the aim of the Decadents, but it stung because of the good humour of its contempt.

Mrs. Grundy's flesh had indeed been made to creep, and she reacted in much the same fashion as did Grandmamma Wardle under a similar operation. She shrieked aloud; her complaints were shrill and bitter. The book ought to be burned and its author imprisoned. It was a disgrace to Victorian England that a man should write such a pernicious work and go unpunished. There was a small minority that read *Dorian Gray* with delight, exulted in the undoubted beauty of some of its passages, and regarded its corruption as a sign that the author had freed himself from those moral restraints which, as they thought, had in the past gone far to prevent true artistic development. There were few probably who took the view which was, somewhat surprisingly, taken by Conan Doyle who called *Dorian Gray* "a book which is surely on a high moral plane." He wrote to Oscar Wilde expressing this view and also his indignation at the way in which the book had been received, and Wilde replied, "I cannot understand how they can treat *Dorian Gray* as immoral. My difficulty was to keep the inherent moral subordinate to the artistic dramatic effect, and it still seems to me that the moral is too obvious."

The clamour of disapproval had by no means died away when on February 20, 1892, a play by Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, was produced at St. James's Theatre. Mr. Graham Robertson has told us that on the previous day Oscar Wilde came to him and asked him to order a carnation artificially tinted green and to wear it at the first performance. A character in the play, a young man, would wear one, and Wilde was anxious that as many as

possible of the audience should do the same. As the theatre filled the next evening it was noticed that many young men wore in their buttonholes this unnaturally coloured flower, and the green carnation became for the next year or so a badge of the decadent cult.

A considerable section of the public thought *Lady Windermere's Fan* almost as immoral as *Dorian Gray* but its witty dialogue and amusing situations delighted the majority and it had a brilliant success. It set the fashion for a type of play which had for its heroine a woman with a past. In May 1893 came one of the most famous of these, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, by Arthur Pinero. All London flocked to St. James's Theatre to see it, and it ran for the entire season. From the more rigid moralists it received the same condemnation that had been given to *Dorian Gray* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Clement Scott "loathed and hated it" and attacked it for its "unloveliness, want of faith, hopeless, despairing creed, worship of the ugly in art and grim repulsive reality." E. F. Benson, in his novel, *The Weaker Vessel*, shows the wife of a country vicar whose stepdaughter had been discovered reading the play in bed, carrying the confiscated copy from the room "at arm's length as if it had been an infectious disease"; and by a great many people who were neither narrow-minded nor censorious these plays were looked upon as unhealthy and unsuited for the reading of young people.

Even more shocking to the proprieties was George Moore's novel, *Esther Waters*, which came at the beginning of 1894. It was not really immoral, indeed it might well have been called a moral story in that it showed that the way of the transgressor—if poor Esther could be called a transgressor—is hard. But it was outspoken, and readers who had been shocked by George Moore's earlier works discerned the same taint in this and for them its high literary merit counted as nothing. "The timidity of people in the matter of George Moore's work is almost incredible," wrote Arnold Bennett some four years later, when the editor of the *Academy*, while fully acknowledging the excellence of a review written by Bennett giving high praise to Moore's *Evelyn Innes*, yet refused to publish it. *Esther Waters* was banned by Smith's Library and accepted with suspicion by Mudie's. It was attacked by the Press and regarded by the public generally as a scandalous example of the decadent literature that was demoralizing the nation.

Yet it had a good sale, and some people admired it intensely. "It is the most poetical book you have written and therefore the truest," wrote Mrs. Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes) to the author. Ultimately a postcard from Mr. Gladstone expressing approval of the book's morality caused Smith's to capitulate. Sales went up until they exceeded those of any previous book of Moore's, though there was still a large public by whom *Esther Waters* was condemned.

By this time the new ideas as to the baneful effects of convention on literature had so far made their way that a plan to publish a Quarterly Review in which young and daring writers should be given a chance to make their works known received the strong support of a number of well-known authors and of John Lane, the publisher. Actually the review turned out to be not nearly as startling as its projectors had pictured it. Its editor was Henry Harland, who, although he admired immensely the wit and talent shown in the work of the decadent group, hated its immorality. He hated even more the sentimentality into which, as he thought, the literature of the day had sunk; and he did his best to make a judicious mixture of the old and the new, choosing the least tainted from both sides. He balanced the audacious efforts of his younger contributors by the work of writers whose literary reputation was established. So that when one April morning in 1894 the passers-by saw the window of John Lane's bookshop in Vigo Street full of massed *Yellow Books* those who went in and paid five shillings for a copy were a little disappointed at finding it less shocking than rumour had led them to expect. The cover, designed by Aubrey Beardsley, was all that the most ardent worshipper of what was new and startling in art could desire. It showed the head of a woman certainly not beautiful by any accepted standard, grotesque rather, and to the ordinary man's eye unpleasing. *The Times*, commenting upon it, said, "If the New Art is represented by the cover of this wonderful volume it is scarcely calculated to attract by its intrinsic beauty or merit; possibly, however, it may be intended to attract by its very repulsiveness and insolence." So far, so good; but inside the cover such pleasurable shocks were few. The first and longest item was a story by Henry James; there were two sonnets by William Watson, an article by George Saintsbury, a poem by Edmund Gosse, and, most unexpected of all, an article on *Reticence in Literature* by Arthur Waugh. Reticence was the last quality

valued by the decadent writers, and it was strange to read in the pages of the *Yellow Book* that it is a quality necessary if a work is to attain immortality. "To endure restraint—that is to be strong," said Mr. Waugh. The other contributions, by Ella D'Arcy, Arthur Symons, Richard Le Gallienne, and Hubert Crockenthorpe, were not more encouraging to those who were seeking examples of the new cult; they were whimsical, fantastic, morbid, or painfully realistic, but there was nothing startling and no one could very well be shocked. Max Beerbohm's delightful "Defence of Cosmetics" was the item most definitely of the 'nineties. "The Victorian era comes to an end," exulted Mr. Beerbohm, "and the day of *sancta simplicitas* is quite ended. . . . Artifice whom we drove out has returned among us. . . . Let us dance and be glad and tread the cockhawhoop."

The succeeding numbers of the *Yellow Book* resembled the first in being a mixture of the old and the new; sometimes the one predominated, sometimes the other. The two poets most closely identified with it were Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. Both were twenty-seven years old when the first number was issued, both were men of frail physique and irregular life. Dowson died of consumption in 1900, and Johnson from a fall in Fleet Street which injured his skull in 1902. Dowson's famous sonnet, "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion," summed up, says Mr. Wingfield Stratford, "the rebellious temper, the artistic ideal of all the group."

But the distinguishing characteristic of the *Yellow Book*—the faintly sinister tone that repelled some readers and attracted others—came through its illustrations. Its chief artist was Aubrey Beardsley. Beardsley was a young man of twenty-three who had shown a remarkable and individual talent in line drawing. It was not a healthy talent; Hilaire Belloc has called it offensive and diseased and Maurice Baring has said that its perfect draughtsmanship seemed to be guided by a malignant demon. Yet the long, sinuous line and the strange twists and dots held a strong fascination, and the subtle undertone, carrying a suggestion of things secret and evil, aroused in some people a pleasurable excitement. The ordinary man could see no beauty in Beardsley's drawings. To him they appeared grotesque, even ugly; but the artist had a select circle of admirers, who, though they recognized his sinister tendencies, were yet enchanted by the beauty of his line. Roger

Fry's phrase for him, "the *Fra Angelica* of Satanism," could not, says Sir Charles Holmes, easily be beaten. In 1893 Beardsley had drawn for an edition of the *Morte d'Arthur*, published by J. M. Dent, a series of decorative drawings, and these, although by their somewhat violent departure from recognized artistic methods they startled the orthodox, were, Mr. Dent maintained, really beautiful. But he could not admire Beardsley's subsequent work. "There crept into it," he says, "something I cannot describe but to me it had a taint of evil which in spite of infinite cleverness and considerable advance in technique made it at times repugnant to me."

After the publication of the fourth number of the *Yellow Book* Beardsley's connection with it ceased. It is said that the poet, William Watson, wrote to the editor stating firmly that no more poems of his should appear between the covers that contained and carried Beardsley's designs. Harland himself had been made uncomfortable by the drawings; he was not, as were most of the cult, bent on outraging public opinion. He decided that Beardsley's work could no longer be accepted, and the *Yellow Book* lost its most distinguishing feature.

Its circulation had never been large and was not increasing. The first numbers had been bought by many people out of curiosity, but few had found these sufficiently interesting or exciting to tempt them to a regular outlay of the quarterly five shillings; the majority had been shocked or contemptuous. Henry James said he hated "the horrid aspect and company of the whole publication" and only wrote for it "for gold and to oblige the worshipful Harland." John Oliver Hobbes, though she too wrote for the *Yellow Book*, said she had never seen such a vulgar publication. Harland could not induce either Mrs. Meynell or Coventry Patmore to contribute to it, though to Mrs. Meynell he wrote, "I think I have heard that your feeling for that periodical is not one of unbounded enthusiasm, *raison de plus* why you should lend a hand to the bettering of it. Won't you do us one of your exquisite essays?" and to Patmore, "I wish I could persuade you to let the *Yellow Book* have a poem. It would turn red with pride." Its sale was chiefly in London and to its own special circle; outside it was scarcely known. Stopford Brooke, writing from Bournemouth about six months after the appearance of the first number, said, "I have not got the *Yellow Book*. This is not the place for its sale." And Arnold Bennett relates how he was asked by a typical respect-

able clerk, "What is this *Yellow Book*, Mr. Bennett?" as if he were enquiring into the nature of the differential calculus or bimetallism.

Its chief attraction was for the young. "Most of us," said Henry Nevinson, "felt an amused interest in the Decadents and were much moved by their finest art in words and illustration." There was growing up a generation of young people who were a little intoxicated by the new freedom that had been granted them. Many of them, girls as well as boys, were living away from their parents in universities, in hostels, or even in lodgings by themselves or with friends of their own age. They were free to read what they chose, and to take up any of the numerous cults of the day that appealed to them. Inevitably they were drawn to the Decadents. The decadent cult was in the forefront of modern movements, which these young people eagerly aspired to reach; the limelight was full upon it; it was anathema to their elders; it had dark suggestions of wickedness which gave the necessary thrill; it was cynical and world-weary, a pose in which they delighted. Berta Ruck tells how, when she was at the Slade School, she and her fellow-students "presently went through our Swinburne-Aubrey Beardsley-Ernest Dowson-Yellow Book and Oscar Wilde phase together. The young thought it interesting to be decadent."

The young, however, did not like ridicule, and they were furiously indignant when, towards the end of 1894, Robert Hichens, in *The Green Carnation*, set all the world laughing at the Decadents and their followers. This was far more deeply resented than the most violent newspaper attacks had been. The book caricatured the movement as a whole, but with special reference to Oscar Wilde and *Dorian Gray*. There was a Mr. Amaranth who stood for Sir Henry Wotton in *Dorian Gray* and Oscar Wilde in real life, and the speeches put into his mouth caught so happily the tone of the original that they could scarcely be called parodies. "To commit a perfect sin is to be great." "The man who invents a new sin is greater than the man who invents a new religion, and no Mrs. Humphry Ward can snatch his glory from him." "To lie firmly is an art, to tell the truth is according to Nature, and Nature is the first of Philistines. Nothing is so absolutely middle-class as Nature." There were female characters also in *The Green Carnation*. There was Mrs. Windsor, a devoted follower of Mr. Amaranth, and Lady Locke, an intelligent and

delightful woman who had been away from London for some years. "London is not the same London as it was ten years ago," she remarked to Mrs. Windsor, and Mrs. Windsor exclaimed, "The same London! I should hope not. Why, Aubrey Beardsley and Mr. Amaranth had not been invented then, and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* had never been written, and women hardly ever smoked." "And men did not wear green carnations," put in Lady Locke.

So apt was the parody that there were people who believed that Oscar Wilde himself had written the book; and charged him with it. He was indignant and disgusted. "I invented that magnificent flower," he said, "but with the middle-class and mediocre book that usurps its strangely beautiful name, I have, I need hardly say, nothing whatsoever to do. The flower is a work of art. The book is not."

He had really no cause to be angry with Mr. Hichens, for although *The Green Carnation* made people laugh, it spread Wilde's name among the public and did nothing to injure the reputation that his brilliant work as a playwright was building up. In February 1895 came *The Importance of Being Earnest*, an absolute masterpiece of wit and high spirits and dramatic effect. As to its morals the critics could find little fault. The worst they could say was that it was trifling, and to that the reply was, "It is precisely because it is consistently trivial that it is not ugly." All London flocked to see it. It was the sensation of the season. But while it was at the height of its triumphant success there came a sensation of another kind. Oscar Wilde brought an action for libel against the Marquis of Queensberry. He lost it, was arrested on a criminal charge arising out of the action, and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

This was the death-blow of the decadent cult, though it took some time in dying. Opponents were not slow to point the moral, and sympathizers felt that the best policy was silence. The *Yellow Book* was no longer the champion of the decadent cause. It had moved farther and farther from its early ideals, and had become simply a high-class quarterly magazine. "The *Yellow Book*, like Mrs. Kenwigs, has now become 'severely proper,' and with its Beardsleyish cover, has shed its early frivolity," said the *Graphic* in February 1896. Arthur Symons, with some others, realizing this, had seceded at the end of 1895 and started a new quarterly

which they called *The Savoy*. This was illustrated by Aubrey Beardsley and was more daring than the *Yellow Book* had ever been. "The spirit of the old *Yellow Book* pervades *The Savoy* a new pink quarterly with Aubrey Beardsley writ large all over it," declared the *Graphic*. "There are pictures, prose, and poetry by Mr. Beardsley in this volume, and all have that peculiar decadent flavour that characterizes his work." In the second number, which appeared in April 1896, the editor wrote: "I wish to thank the critics for the flattering reception which they have given to No. 1. That reception has been none the less flattering because it has been for the most part unfavourable. Any new endeavour lends itself, alike by its merits and its defects, to the disapproval of the larger number of people."

The Savoy was continued, though with declining success, until the death of Aubrey Beardsley in 1898. Then it collapsed. The *Yellow Book* came to an end in the same year; and the decadent cult faded away.

CHAPTER IV

BOOKS FROM FRANCE

DURING the greater part of the nineteenth century the books which came to England from the Continent came mainly from France. To the general public foreign literature meant French literature, French literature meant French novels, and French novels meant vice and immorality. This conviction was not founded on any extensive study of the works in question; few translations were available, and the number of people who could read the stories in the original was small. A knowledge of the French language was not considered an altogether desirable accomplishment. As Rudyard Kipling has said with reference to the period of his school-days (1878-82), it "conneded leanings towards immorality." There was a general impression that France was a depraved country where solid English virtue was unknown. References in the Press, jokes in the comic papers, popular songs and tourists' tales, all gave support to this view, and strengthened the ordinary Englishman in his conviction that French novels were propaganda of the most pernicious sort. When, in a novel by one of his own countrymen, he discovered the lovely heroine reclining, seductively garbed, in her luxurious boudoir and reading a French novel, he knew her at once for the heartless siren she inevitably proved to be. When the lady reader saw the splendid soldier hero calmly perusing one of these abominable works on the eve of battle, she realized with a thrill that he was as wicked as he was courageous. Most of Ouida's heroes and heroines read French novels, the works of De Kock and Le Brun being their favourites. Thackeray's "reprobate," Miss Matilda Crawley, adored the novels of Le Brun, and gloated over them in company with her engaging young protégée, Miss Rebecca Sharp. Readers of *Lady Audley's Secret* were quite prepared (mistakenly, as it proved) to find in Robert Audley the villain of the piece, when they were introduced to him lying, negligently attired, in a shady spot in the Temple Gardens reading a French novel; and when, in *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, the detectives found French novels on the bookshelves of the suspected murderer, it was felt that the case against him was materially strengthened.

The evidence of those English readers who had made a first-

hand acquaintance with the works of the fashionable French novelists goes to show that the general public was not greatly mistaken in its estimate of their fascination and their immorality. Mrs. Carlyle found much in them to enjoy, though in a letter to her cousin, Miss Helen Welsh, wherein she discussed suggestions for books to be read aloud to her uncle, she said, "Paul de Kock? He is very witty. Yes, but also very indecent; and my uncle would not relish indecencies read aloud to him by his daughters." Fanny Kemble's niece, whom in her diary she calls A——, was a great admirer of these works. "A—— has been trying to inoculate me with Paul de Kock," wrote the aunt, "who, she assures me, is a moral writer, and with whose books our tables, chairs, sofas and beds are covered as with the unclean plagues of Europe. They are very clever, very funny, very dirty, abominably immoral, and I do not think I *can* read any more of them; for though I confess to having laughed till my sides ached over some part of what I read, I was upon reflection and upon the whole disgusted and displeased."

These criticisms, it is true, were made in the 'forties, and a reader of to-day might be inclined to attribute them to early Victorian hyper-morality and narrow-mindedness. The inevitable association of French novels and immorality did not, however, cease with the early Victorians. In the later years of the Queen's reign, when a vaunted laxity was taking the place of over-strictness, it was as strong as ever though less seriously regarded. In 1887 that sane critic, Matthew Arnold, pronounced a similar judgment on the French novel of his day: "palpitating with modernity"; and in 1889 Henry James's sister Alice, who certainly had no touch of Victorianism about her, wrote in her diary:—

I shall have to give up reading French novels; a course of perpetual adulteries becomes more deadly than one can say, and makes one long to fly for excitement to one of Miss Yonge's profligate groups of legitimate offspring; as far as Morality is concerned I don't think there is much to choose.

Typical of the readers who delighted in French novels was Lord Comber, the effeminate dandy of E. F. Benson's *Mammon and Co.*, who had a large collection of these yellow-backed productions, read Gautier's *Mademoiselle de la Maupin* with absorbed enjoyment, and kept "little vellum-bound indecencies of French verse" on the table at his bedside. Perhaps the best description of the evil fascina-

tion exercised by these writers is given in Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Dorian is shown, in the early days of his youth and innocence, reading a book sent him by Lord Henry Wotton, which, although it is not named, is almost certainly meant to be J. K. Huysman's famous novel, *A Rebours*.

It was the strangest book he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him. Things of which he had never dreamed were suddenly revealed. . . . There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids and as evil in colour. The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spirit ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain.

Few English readers distinguish between these exotic productions and the works of the really great French novelists—Georges Sand, Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant. Those who did so distinguish received these latter works with enthusiasm, although they recognized their moral laxity. "The French have quite a different standard from ourselves in literature just as they have a different standard in regard to honour. All this is purely artificial," said an Oxford don in Galsworthy's *Island Pharisees*, concerning Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, which another don had described as detailing the "feelings of a middle-class woman with a taste for vice." Campbell-Bannerman was an enthusiast for the works of Flaubert, Balzac and Maupassant, and was popularly supposed to spend most of his leisure in reading French novels, which was not counted to his credit. Mr. A. J. Balfour also was known as a lover of these works—was even accused by a member of his family of "making a raft with a sponge" to support one of them while he took his bath. John Morley claimed to have been reared on Georges Sand, and George Moore said that Balzac had opened to him a new world. Of Balzac's *Eugène Grandet* H. H. Asquith said, "It is not pleasant, though quite free from the grossness, whether subtle or coarse, of the latter-day French school." But to the general public these names meant nothing, and a respectable father of a family would

have been as shocked to see his daughter reading *François le Champis* as to see her reading *Mademoiselle de la Maupin*.

As for the classic French writers, their circle of readers was still smaller and was diminishing. "I am now sending you some valuable books beautifully bound, Corneille, Racine, etc.," wrote Mrs. W. G. Ward to her son Wilfrid in 1899. "They are what every gentleman's library should have and your children must know them as I was taught them young to my great advantage." By 1899, however, the process of discarding all that was old in literature was well advanced, and the French suffered with the English.

It is clear, therefore, that only by a very strong and spirited assault could a breach be made in the barrier that had been raised by diversity of national temperament and by prejudice, so that a French book could enter freely and become generally popular in England. Such an assault was made—and at a time when the barrier seemed most impregnable—by the romantic school of French writers under the leadership of Victor Hugo and Alexander Dumas. Hugo began to write in the early 'thirties and Dumas some ten years later, but it was some time before adequate translations were available in England. Hugo's *Notre Dame* made a triumphant entry, but it was with Dumas that the full force of the attack was felt. Before the dash and vigour of *The Three Musketeers* and *Monte Cristo* the Englishman's defences went down, and the invaders, having entered, were recognized with joyful surprise as belonging—in spite of their foreign parentage—to the same great race as *Waverley* and *Guy Mannering*. "Scott is the most beautiful, only Dumas is more to my heart—only that I love Scott most," said Edward Burne-Jones. He and his lifelong friend, William Morris, were young men when the works of Dumas first came to England. They read them then with delight, and they were still reading them together when both were nearing sixty. "*Monte Cristo* will never grow stale," prophesied Henry Kingsley in *Austin Elliott* (1863), and he is supported by the testimony of many lifelong readers; while to successive generations of boys and girls Dumas came with a freshness and delight that showed no signs of diminishing.

It was not without qualms that the parents saw their children fall, as they themselves had fallen, under the spell of this French writer. For the French taint clung to his works; they were definitely immoral. There were passages in them which could not

possibly be read aloud in the family circle. Yet if they were once admitted to the house it was difficult, almost impossible, to keep the children from them. They were, as fair-minded parents ruefully acknowledged, so pre-eminently books for the young. They were pure romance, high-spirited and gay, and calling to great adventure. Nevertheless, morality required that they should be banned, and banned they were in many families. Some parents compromised, as did Mrs. Kendal, of Charlotte Yonge's *Young Stepmother*, who, finding her stepson reading *The Three Musketeers*—"one of the worst and most fascinating of Dumas's romances," says Miss Yonge—gently suggested that he should give the book to her and she would read to him such portions as were suitable for his hearing. But such methods found little favour. To cut Dumas in this fashion turned the swift rush of interest into a stumbling progression. The young people wanted to read Dumas for themselves; even the enormous length of the stories did not deter them. They persisted in claiming full rights in this author, who seemed specially their own, and in many cases they were successful. Robert Louis Stevenson read *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* when he was fourteen or fifteen (about 1865) and in *A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's*, written nearly twenty years later, he told of that reading and its delights, and of subsequent readings which gave the book a place among the six to which, he said, "I have long been faithful, and hope to be faithful to the day of death. . . . For no part of the world has ever seemed to me so charming as these pages, and not even my friends are quite so real, perhaps so dear, as d'Artagnan."

Dumas died in 1870 and Victor Hugo in 1885, and each left behind him a large collection of stories that were to delight English as well as French readers for many years to come. Henry Newbolt was one of those who were drawn to Dumas through Stevenson's essay. F. E. Smith (afterwards Lord Birkenhead) was possibly another, for he read much of Stevenson and all Dumas's stories during his first year at Oxford in 1891. By this time familiarity had made the name of Dumas sound less uneasily in the ears of English parents. Maurice Baring tells how, in 1889, his mother herself gave him a copy of *Monte Cristo* on his fifteenth birthday, and how he took it back to Eton with him and spent a whole breathless afternoon—oblivious of the school bell that called him to his place in class—reading of Dantes' escape from the Château d'If, and how he was lucky enough to escape detection. A few

years later B. Farjeon, the novelist, was introducing his somewhat precocious family to "all the inexhaustible delights of Dumas." He read *Monte Cristo* aloud to them. "The night Dantes was escaping from Château d'If," says his daughter Eleanor, who was then about eight years old, "I screamed in bed. Father had to come and tell me no harm had come to Dantes." For thirty years she never dared to read *Monte Cristo* again, but she read *The Three Musketeers* with her brother and both delighted in it. "I am Porthos, I love him, I love him." "I had periods of certain authors to the exclusion of others," she says, "above all the Dumas period which has never passed."

Miss Alice Ottley, the highly-esteemed first head-mistress of Worcester High School, did something towards influencing opinion among the parents of her scholars and others when she said, in 1893,

True, it is dangerous to read French books without good guidance, but this is generally to be had; and there is a delicious piquancy and delicacy in the fun of French writers which I venture to think no other nation can approach.

Wise elders had come to realize that the works of Dumas held no poison for the immature mind. In the breathless excitement of their swift, heroic narrative the boys and girls scarcely noticed the lapses from morality, or if they noticed, did not understand. This was the view taken by Lord Esher when, in 1903, his daughter, as he says, "embarked on a wild career of Dumas."

I cannot think they will do her any harm. The adventures which suggest everything to those who understand represent very little to those who do not. To her it all seems very heroic and far-off, much as the manners and customs of the Tibetans do to us. . . . Anyhow, I am sure of this, that had she been forbidden to read them she would have read them on the sly.

With the elder Dumas and Victor Hugo the great age of romance in France ended. There came no more brave tales of high adventure, of life lived gaily and dangerously; instead, the old sensuous, seductive stories, with no fresh, purging wind blowing through them. There was, it is true, another Alexandre Dumas, but the stories that he sent to England had none of the romantic spirit that glorified his father's. They were mostly in the form of

plays and were definitely in the French tradition. A little scene in *Robert Elsmere* gives some idea of their character. Edward Langham, a cultured, fastidious Oxford don, is reading one of them, *Marianne*, in Robert's Surrey garden.

The play turned upon a typical French situation, treated in a manner rather more French than usual. The reader shrugged his shoulders a good deal as he read on. "Strange nation!" he muttered to himself, after an act or two. "How they do revel in mud."

The fifth act, however, got hold of him "with that force which, after all, only a French playwright is master of," and he was living "in Dumas's heated atmosphere of passion and crime" when Catherine Elsmere and her young sister Rose appeared. Langham was scandalized and Catherine much distressed when Rose proclaimed defiantly that she had read *Marianne* and several other of Dumas's plays and admired them extremely; but it was clear, Langham decided, from her comments that though she had read them she had never understood them.

The power of the plays that had conquered Langham conquered many other readers and Dumas fils had a band of enthusiastic admirers, though not as large a one as that of his father. Grant Allen expressed his delight in verse:—

One book of yours I keep where'er I roam,
Prophet and friend and teacher, dear Dumas,
A dog's-eared, thumb-marked, paper-covered tome,
La Dame aux Camélias.

It lies upon my table day and night,
For sober English friends to eye askance
In pious awe, the tale whose witching sleight
Corrupted godless France.

The voluptuous atmosphere and sensuous charm which caused many readers to tolerate the more unpleasant qualities of the works of Dumas fils were absent from those of a new school of writers that came into prominence in France during the late 'seventies. It was known as the realistic or naturalistic school, and its chief exponent was Emile Zola. Zola told, with an abundance of sordid, even brutal detail, of the life of great cities, its splendour and its shame. Beginning with *La Fortune des Rougon* in 1871, he wrote a series which ultimately consisted of twenty novels, dealing with the

history of a single French family, and known as the Rougon-Macquart Series. His coarse realism proved too much even for the not easily shocked French public, and there was an outcry against him. His avowed purpose was to scourge society for its sins and so to bring about a reformation, and he had a large following in France and a small one in England that accepted him as a reformer. Among his English admirers was the publisher Henry Vizetelly, and to him it seemed that to bring adequate translations of Zola's books within the reach of the English people would be a good work. So far—in the early 'eighties—there were few translations and those few were full of errors and defaced by alterations and excisions. Vizetelly's son undertook the task of translation, and in 1884 the issue of a new English version of Zola's novels began. The two famous stories, *L'Assommoir* and *Nana*, came first, and were followed by sixteen others. Some cuts were made, but not enough to affect the character of the works.

The books had a large sale. Vizetelly said he counted that a bad week in which less than a thousand copies were sold. They were put into circulation quietly, and no immediate outcry arose against them; and for four years the sale went on. To many people the life and vigour and interest of the stories atoned for their coarseness, but upon the whole public opinion was against them. The opposition rapidly gathered strength and a campaign, led by W. T. Stead, was started against "pernicious literature" in general and the works of Zola in particular. A motion that the law against such literature should be "enforced and if necessary strengthened" was introduced in Parliament and carried unanimously; and in October 1888 Henry Vizetelly was charged at the Old Bailey with "disseminating pernicious and immoral literature." He was found guilty, was fined a hundred pounds, and bound over for twelve months, and upon his continuing (through a misunderstanding, it was claimed) to issue some of the works was imprisoned for three months.

This, it might be thought, put an end to the circulation of translations of Zola's works in England. But there still remained to him a considerable and influential company of English admirers, and these were not content that he should disappear from notice. George Moore was his enthusiastic champion and was supported by Sir Walter Besant and other prominent members of the Institute of Journalists and the Authors' Society. Henry Vizetelly, broken down and almost ruined, had retired from business, but his son

Ernest still cherished a hope of reintroducing his translations of Zola's works into England. His opportunity came in 1890, when Zola wrote a story which, in subject and treatment, was unlike anything he had written before. It was called *La Débâcle*, and was about the Franco-Prussian War; and it told its terrible story with a realism that was not squalid but magnificent. English men and women, remembering Sedan, could not but sympathize. The translation when it came was received with enthusiasm, and was freely sold without protest by the authorities. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman declared that it had stuff in it; Robert Louis Stevenson called it "an epical performance"; Sir Max Pemberton said, "There is no better picture of Sedan." Zola's previous offences were forgotten, or, at least, were allowed to remain in the background.

One by one translations of his other works reappeared, and they, too, remained unchallenged. The 'nineties had come and Victorianism had lost its hold on a large proportion of the reading public. *Dorian Gray* had appeared, and many people were inclined to accept, at least tacitly, Oscar Wilde's dictum that there is no such thing as an immoral book, a book is a work of art or it is not. Zola's books, said these people, were undoubtedly works of art and as such must be accepted. Feeling was so far in his favour that his friends decided in 1893 to ask him to visit England, and he accepted the invitation. He was received at Victoria Station by a company of British journalists and literary men and escorted through the city "much like a visiting potentate." Learned societies gave dinners in his honour, the Athenaeum made him a member for the duration of his stay, he was feted and flattered and assured that he held a high place in the regard of English readers.

This was true to only a very limited extent. To many people Zola still stood for all that was immoral and unclean, almost for what was beastly. Clergymen still denounced him as the hateful seducer of youth, parents still shuddered to see his books in the hands of their sons and daughters. When Dr. Firmalden, the cultured and devout Congregational minister of John Oliver Hobbes's *The Dream and the Business*, saw in the study of his undergraduate son some photographs of Goya's pictures, some Zolas and a volume of Byron, he was horrified.

"When I see such pictures on a wall and such books on a shelf," he said, "I know what to expect." And with that he marched downstairs.

"There is not a book of that famous writer that is not defiled by some obscenity or sensuality lurking in its pages," declared Mrs. Desmond Humphreys ("Rita"), "and what good have they done? The literary world would be none the poorer if a funeral pyre had been made of all Zola's books—from *L'Assommoir* to *Fruitfulness*—on the day of publication." Mr. Holbrook Jackson considered Zola's realism "squalid, mechanical, and uninspired." G. K. Chesterton went deeper. He hated Zola as he hated all who tried to prevent men from seeing life as a fine and happy adventure. "I am grown up," he said, "and I do not worry myself much about Zola's immorality. The thing I cannot stand is his morality. This man actually hates evil because there is pleasure in it. Zola . . . did worse than encourage sin; he encouraged discouragement. He made lust loathsome because to him lust meant life."

Nevertheless Zola had many readers and it is interesting to try to see how this company was made up. First there were those who, like the Vizetellys, Richard Le Gallienne and Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, saw him as the foe of the evil he uncovered, inspired by a "passionate idealism." "To those of us who were not dismayed by Zola's determination to avoid the older types of romanticism which liked sins only in scented sheets," says Sir Peter, "the Rougon-Macquart series came as a magnificent attempt to make a synthesis of life, not as it might be imagined but as it is." Next came those who looked on Zola simply as a great writer, and delighted in his high literary qualities without troubling much about his morality. Arnold Bennett was one of these. *Nana* he read with great enjoyment, and when later he saw the play founded upon it, "My admiration of the book," he says, "leaped out again into a flame." *L'Assommoir* he did not place so high. *L'Œuvre* he thought "serious, tremendous and imposing."

The final scene between Claude and Christine—the fight between love and art—is simply magnificent; it moved me; it is one of the finest things in Zola. It is overdone, it goes farther than the truth; but purposely. Zola has stepped into the heroic in this scene, as he does now and then. All the close of the book is most affecting.

Lady Dorothy Nevill belonged, presumably, to the same group of admirers as Arnold Bennett, for she tells how, on a day when she was giving a luncheon party, Zola's *La Bête Humaine* lay on her drawing-room table. One of her guests, "a prig fresh from the

University," noticed it. "Surely, Lady Dorothy, you must be aware that this is no book for a lady," he said in a shocked tone "Really," replied his hostess; "anyhow it's just the book for me."

The Decadents admired Zola, not in spite of his realism, but because of it. He, like themselves, refused to be bound by what others considered the laws of morality and decency. They read him eagerly; the decadent young painter, Brydone, of "Iota's" *Yellow Aster*, is described as being "steeped to the lips in Zola." There was, in spite of striking differences, much in common between the French realists and the English Decadents. "George Moore is supposed to belong to the naturalistic school," said Joseph Conrad, "and Zola is his prophet."

There were some readers—and these probably made up a considerable portion of Zola's public—who were attracted rather than repelled by the unsavoury detail that he supplied in such abundance. "They neither admire nor understand the man's art," said R. L. Stevenson, "and only wallow in his rancidness like a hound in offal." Typical of these were Colonel Colquhoun, of Sarah Grand's *Heavenly Twins*, who gave his wife *Nana* and *La Terre* to read, "anticipating much entertainment from the observation of their effect upon her"; the Oxford don of Galsworthy's *Island Pharisees*, who liked "a spicy story"; and the tutor of Mary Cholmondeley's *Prisoners*, who "read the vilest French novels as a duty . . . and whose cryptic warnings on the empire of the passions would have made a baboon blush."

Finally, there were those—they can scarcely be classed as readers—who tried Zola's works and, finding them distasteful, read no more. "I had a rooted distrust of anything like realism, and had always failed to appreciate the strength of Zola in my distaste for his coarseness," says Mr. Arthur Waugh. Burne-Jones gave him up because he made him miserable. "He doesn't see that it is his choice of material, not his truth to life that people object to," the artist complained. Sir Edwin Arnold told how he read *La Terre* on board ship, while crossing the Atlantic, and, having finished it, hurled the book into the sea—an action which has been somewhat unkindly criticized, but which surely was natural enough. A work of genius compels the attention and almost forces the reader to go on to the end; then comes the reaction. And if Sir Edwin told in his paper, the *Daily Telegraph*, of what he had done, that, surely, also was natural—may even be considered laudable and

public-spirited. At any rate, there were many people who, in their different circumstances and more limited sphere, acted very much as Sir Edwin had done.

In 1898 came the Dreyfus case and Zola's fine and courageous letter, *J'accuse*, published in *L'Aurore*. Readers in England followed his efforts on behalf of the accused officer with intense interest and sympathy, and admiration of his action caused many people who had hitherto shunned his books to turn to them, forgoing prejudice, and prepared to find something good in them even if it had to be sought among foulness. By the time the case reached its terrible conclusion, Zola had attained in the eyes of the English people a position higher than he had ever held before. His name was honoured and his books were read widely and with a more sympathetic understanding. But his popularity was not of an enduring character, and it had already waned before his death in 1902.

While Dumas and Zola had raised the French novel to a position of high literary importance, they had done nothing towards removing the stigma of immorality that it bore for English people. French novels were still considered unfit for the reading of the young, and many of the adults who read them did so with an uneasy sense of shame. Mr. W. J. Locke, in his novel, *Stella Maris*, gives a scene between a dignified elderly aunt and her niece, a girl of twenty-two:—

One evening she picked up a French novel which Sir Oliver had left in the drawing-room.

"Don't read that, Stella dear," said Lady Blount.

"Why?" asked Stella.

"I don't think it's suitable for young girls."

"Is it unclean?"

"My darling, what an extraordinary word!" said Lady Blount.

"Is it unclean?" Stella persisted.

"It deals with a certain side of life that is not wholesome for young girls to dwell upon."

"You haven't answered my question, Auntie."

"The fact that your uncle and I have read it is an answer, dear," said Lady Blount, with some dignity.

"Then I will read it too," said Stella.

She took it up to her bedroom and opened it in the middle; but after a few pages her cheeks grew hot and her heart cold, and she threw the book out of the window.

The scene is entirely typical of many that were taking place all over the country, except that, in most cases, the younger generation, having claimed its right to read what it pleased, read, like Sir Edwin Arnold, from beginning to end.

There was, however, one French novelist who did not come under the general condemnation. "Certainly," says Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, "there was no fear that a book of Anatole France on the table laid its owner open to the suspicion that he was a devotee of the obscene. It was even respectable to admire him." Anatole France published his first book, *Jocaste*, in 1879, and quickly became famous in his own country, but it was not until 1895 that he was introduced to the general reading public of England. In that year Maurice Baring wrote an essay upon him and his work in volume v of the *Yellow Book*, and a little later a number of his novels were translated by Mr. Lewis May and published by John Lane. Anatole France did not become popular in England as Dumas and Zola were popular. He was read chiefly by thoughtful, cultured men and women who could appreciate what H. W. Nevinson (a staunch admirer) called "his perfect irony, the subtle smile, so nearly grave, so nearly laughter, but never solemn, and never raising the boisterous noise of fun." "*L'Ile des Pingouins* is delicious," declared John Galsworthy. "Ada (Mrs. Galsworthy) says the 'wickedest' book she ever read. It is the right word. She loved it."

L'Ile des Pingouins was one of the best-known of Anatole France's works. It was a favourite of Sir Charles Dilke's. Mr. John Bailey tells how it was discussed at the dinner of the Literary Society in 1909, and its author compared to Voltaire. Sir Sidney Colvin, he says, hated the book "for its beastliness and purely destructive quality." But its beastliness was not the gratuitous beastliness complained of in the ordinary French novel, it was inevitable in the presentation of his subject. "If you wish to realize the monstrous horror of war, read *L'Ile des Pingouins*," said H. W. Nevinson, and the "monstrous horror" could not be brought home to readers, even by Anatole France, without some plain speaking. "Zola scoured into us the imbecilities and monstrosities of civilization, Anatole France had an even greater influence because he made us understand them and smile at them," says Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell.

The "purpose" of France's novels was, however, not intrusive

and most people read him for pure enjoyment. He was one of the favourite authors of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and Dame Ethel Smyth has told of the pleasure his books have given her. Robert Blatchford called him "the great French wizard," and said that his characters, shown in the "magic mirror of his consummately graceful art," were "absolutely convincing." "I've been reading with great delight *L'Orme du Mail* and *Le Mannequin D'Osier*, by Anatole France," wrote John Galsworthy in May 1905, "the latter is the best. M. Bergeret is a great creation." John Bailey strongly advised his friend, the Reverend F. G. Ellerton, to read France's admirable *Les Dieux ont Soif*. "It is a thing over which one lingers to goûter les phrases, exquisitely written and very exciting." When he died in 1924, H. W. Nevinson wrote of him, "Anatole France was one of those men who 'fill the world,' as Victor Hugo said of himself. . . . The very spirit of his country breathed in Anatole France."

CHAPTER V

THE ELDER AND THE YOUNGER POETS

WHEN Tennyson died in October 1892 and was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey beside his great contemporary, Robert Browning, all those who loved poetry and cared for its future felt that the event had a national and a symbolic significance. The last of the great Victorians had gone, the last tree in that wonderful grove that had given shelter and delight to a generation of readers was laid low. There were those who had begun to feel that this mighty tree had stood too long, that it had hidden and stunted the other growths that had sprung up in its shade. Now these could lift up their heads and have their fill of air and sunshine, and prove whether they too possessed the vital principle that could bring them to a strong and beautiful maturity.

When men looked round and began to take stock of the poets still left to them, the result was a little disappointing. When the previous Poet Laureate, William Wordsworth, had died, forty-two years before, there had been little question as to who should take his place. The nation at large had already made its choice, and the authorities could but confirm the clearly expressed decision of the reading public. Now no one poet stood high above the rest in public estimation. There was Algernon Swinburne, but he had dropped out of general notice; moreover, he was still, to many people, the licentious author of *Poems and Ballads*, "the fiery imp from the pit," whose exaltation to any place of national honour was unthinkable. True poetry lovers, who honoured him as the great poet he was, spoke out forcibly. "I must say that in *my* judgment Swinburne's claims are immeasurably superior to those of any Englishman now living," wrote George Wyndham to Mary Gladstone, very soon after Tennyson's death. He knew, he said, that Swinburne's early record was remembered against him, but he believed that "in the long run public opinion will be more shocked by his neglect than by his recognition." In 1894, when the question of the Laureateship was still undecided, W. E. Henley wrote, in a review of a recently published volume of Swinburne's poems:—

To hear them sing themselves . . . is to reflect that if he does not have the chance of sitting in the laurelled seat of Jonson and

Wordsworth, then is England not the England he loves and sings but an England that deserves no better in that chair than the rhyming dullard she is like—so men say—to get.

Henley's "rhyming dullard" was by most readers identified as Alfred Austin, who was at this time being spoken of as the probably successful candidate; but his selection was by no means certain. There was a little group of mediocre poets, each of whom seemed to have an almost equal chance. "I am sorry that Tennyson has crossed the bar," wrote Ernest Dowson to Victor Plar, in October 1892, "if only that it leaves us so much at the mercy of Lewis Morris, Austin et Cie." George Augustus Sala, after having placed Swinburne high above, by himself, arranged this company in the following order—Edwin Arnold, Alfred Austin, Lewis Morris, William Morris. Others might vary the order, but, except in the case of William Morris, there would be substantial agreement in classing these poets together.

Sir Edwin Arnold was then sixty years old. His first poems had been published in 1852, but it was not until his *Light of Asia* appeared in 1879 that he became known beyond a small circle of readers. The subject of the *Light of Asia* was Buddhism, and this attracted a large number of those who did not ordinarily read much poetry but were interested in religion and in the life of the Asiatic peoples. Elinor Glyn seems to have been attracted by its descriptions of Oriental magnificence; she compared the garden of Prince Hussein, which she visited in Cairo, to "that surrounding the palace of King Suddhodana, in the *Light of Asia*." Mrs. Clement Scott called the poem an immortal work, Mrs. T. P. O'Connor professed herself its ardent admirer. Its popularity must have been considerable, for by 1885 it had reached its twenty-fifth edition. In that year Charles Gore, then a young man of thirty-two, read it during his voyage to India, and wrote to his mother that he had found it very difficult to get through, adding significantly, "Deliver me from poetry that is not first-rate!" To Dean Church, who read it in 1889, a year before his death, it seemed "a most melancholy, but in parts beautiful book." "But," he added, "what a Light!"

Alfred Austin was three years younger than Edwin Arnold, and had begun his poetical career three years later. He had produced verse that was good and pleasing of its kind, though it could not be classed as fine poetry, and he had also produced verse of appalling flatness and banality. W. H. Mallock, who knew him well, says

that he had more of true poetry in him than many people imagined, and that "it would be possible to select from his works isolated passages of high and supreme beauty." Edmund Gosse held the same opinion and called one of his poems "a charming little rose-bush." Unfortunately it was by his worst that he was commonly judged, and the tendency was to regard him with amused indulgence as being slightly ridiculous, though well-meaning. When, in 1870, the Prince of Wales lay dangerously ill, a couplet, said to be by Alfred Austin, was widely quoted:—

Across the wires the electric message came—
"He is not better, he is much the same."

It is unlikely that Austin had anything to do with the couplet, but the fact that it was joyfully received as his by the general public shows the estimation in which his works were held. He was spoken of slightly as "little Alfred," with reference both to his stature and his poetic performance. Browning, in *Pacchiarotto*, published in 1876, had derided—

Quilp-Hop-o'-my-thumb, there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there,

and this was generally understood as referring to Alfred Austin; but most people had considered the attack to be unfair as well as in bad taste, and it had won for the victim a good deal of sympathy.

Austin was, fortunately for himself, gifted with an egotism that neither censure nor ridicule could easily pierce, and this being well known among his personal acquaintances, laid him open to the delighted attentions of the young and irreverent. To the young family of Archbishop Benson he was a source of much joyful entertainment. A visit paid by him to their home at Addington soon after Tennyson's death gave them, and Mr. Austin, their finest opportunity. They feigned rapt attention when he spoke, and without difficulty led him on to discourse freely of his own poetry and that of his contemporaries, and of his hope, almost his certainty, of obtaining the coveted Laureateship; and then he spoke in hushed and solemn tones of "It"—the inspiration that guided him in his work—and his dissembling listeners exclaimed in what they hoped would be taken for awe, but which was really rapturous delight.

Equally sanguine of his chances of the Laureateship was Lewis Morris, and he had many supporters. In age he came between

Austin and Arnold, but he had not published any of his work before 1871. His verse was smooth and clear and commonplace. Mr. Saintsbury has said that Lewis Morris set out to be a *Tennyson des enfants* and succeeded admirably. His best-known work, *The Epic of Hades*, was published in 1877. Maurice Baring, when he was at Eton in 1889, won the prize for science and chose *The Epic of Hades*.

I had to go to Mr. Cornish . . . to have my name written in it. He was disgusted with my choice, and he advised me to change the book. But I was obdurate. I had chosen the book for its nice smooth binding, and nothing would make me reconsider my decision. "It's poor stuff," said Mr. Cornish, "it's like boys' Latin verses when they're very good."

Few of the critics were kind to Lewis Morris. They spoke of him as "the Tupper of the later nineteenth century," and Meredith called him "the Harlequin Clown of the Muses." Those two uncompromising ladies, aunt and niece, whose joint poems were signed "Michael Field," were contemptuous. "One is patient with his egregious face, his 'bêtise,' his bad art, out of pity, because he is dimly conscious he belongs to darkness. There is something of deplorable tragi-comedy in the way he quotes his own lines," said Miss Edith Cooper (the niece); and in 1895 Miss Katherine Bradley (the aunt) commented, "Lewis Morris has been knighted —*Dio mio*—the grocer of Parnassus—poor man!"

On the whole the feeling of the public concerning these three elder poets was summed up in the words of Alfred Lyall—himself a poet: "If one must have a Laureate, choose the least of evils, choose Austin."

There were, however, others whose claims were enthusiastically supported by small bodies of admirers. One of these was William Morris, but he was not anxious for the honour, and had, moreover, turned from poetry to prose and to activities connected with the spreading of Socialism. W. E. Henley, then editing the *National Review*, openly coveted the post. The claims of Coventry Patmore were almost passionately advocated by Mrs. Meynell. She tried to convince her friends, but most of them had formed their judgments on Patmore's early poem, *The Angel in the House*, which, although it had passages of great beauty, had some that were so tamely domestic as to be almost laughable. George Meredith said he could

not forget the portrait of the Dean, "one of the superior police of the English middle class, for whom attendant seraphs, in a visible far distance, hold the ladder, not undeserved, when a cheerful digestion shall have ceased." John Oliver Hobbes said Patmore made her feel ill. John Bailey thought him really admirable when he could rise above being old-maidish. Patmore's later work—a book of odes, called *The Unknown Eros*, published in 1871—was of much higher poetic quality. "For my part," said John Freeman, in his book, *The Moderns*,

this is the only modern verse, other than some lines of Shakespeare, Burns and Keats, which I find it hard to read without tears, and though I have read these odes a thousand times I know not where precisely the seat of their poignancy is lodged.

"I have never told you what I think of your poetry. It is the greatest thing in the world, the most harrowing and the sweetest," wrote Mrs. Meynell to Coventry Patmore. He on his side admired her and her work, both poetry and prose, almost to adoration. He wrote to the *Fortnightly Review* setting forth in glowing terms the qualities of her poetry that entitled her to succeed Tennyson as Poet Laureate, and this claim was strongly supported by other of her friends, including Robertson Nicoll.

Months and even years went by and still the choice was delayed. Wilfrid Blunt noted in his diary on October 15, 1893: "Spencer Lyttelton came to-day from Hawarden, and we had a great discussion about the Poet Laureateship." The general sense of the Government was in favour of Swinburne, but the Queen opposed this choice because of the immorality of his early poems. "The one thing we are afraid of," Lyttelton said, "is having Lewis Morris thrust upon us. William Morris will not take it, and so no appointment will be made." A slight tension began to be apparent. At one of Lady Jeune's famous receptions, in the autumn of 1895, Lewis Morris, Patmore and Austin were all present among a host of other notabilities. Morris, said Patmore, "stared at me with a very sour look, which someone to whom I was talking explained by saying that Morris looked upon my being there as a bid for the Laureateship." It was probably at this same reception that, as the story is told, Lewis Morris complained bitterly to Oscar Wilde of the way in which his claim to the Laureateship was ignored. "It is a complete conspiracy of silence against me, a conspiracy

of silence! What ought I to do, Oscar?" "Join it," replied Wilde.

At length, on January 1, 1896, came the announcement: "Her Majesty has been pleased to appoint Alfred Austin, Esq., to be Poet Laureate to Her Majesty." Austin was almost beside himself with delight, especially when "generous congratulations came pouring in by telegraph from persons of every degree of literary, artistic and social eminence." Sir Edwin Arnold's telegram ran, "Heartiest congratulations, with which no grudge mingles, although I myself expected the appointment." "I would rather be the man who could send such a telegram in such circumstances," commented Austin, "than have been incapable of sending it and yet have written the greatest of poems." Not all the disappointed candidates were equally generous. "It is a nuisance to miss the wreath, especially through such an ape as Alfred Austin," grumbled Henley.

The public, as a whole, received the news of Austin's appointment with amused disgust. Wilfrid Blunt, famous as a poet, traveller, and authority on the affairs of Egypt and Ireland, said that he did not write to the new Laureate because he could not say anything about his poetry that would please him. "He is better anyhow than Lewis Morris, or than Watson, Dobson, Davidson and the rest of the sons of their own penny trumpets," Blunt said. Meredith thought that it would "suit little Alfred to hymn the babies of the House of Hanover," and in answer to Miss Margot Tennant, who said she wondered what Austin himself thought of his appointment, he growled out, "It is very hard to say what a bantam is thinking of when he is crowing."

The new Laureate certainly crowed rather loudly. He wrote a letter to the leading newspapers expressing his "deep sense of the kindness that has prompted not only so many men of letters, but so many hundreds of my countrymen and countrywomen, of all classes, both at home and abroad, and on both sides of the Atlantic, to send me their generous congratulations." An opportunity to show what he could do in his official capacity occurred almost at once. A few days after his appointment news of the Jameson Raid reached England, and Austin hastened to sing the praises of those who had taken part in it, as by the mouth of one of them. His poem, which appeared in *The Times* on January 11th, ended with these verses:—

I suppose we were wrong, were madmen,
Still I think at the Judgment Day,
When God sifts the good from the bad men,
There'll be something more to say.

We were wrong, but we aren't half sorry,
And as one of the baffled band,
I would rather have had that foray
Than the crushings of all the Rand.

Bishop Westcott, writing to Mr. J. C. Medd, told how relieved he felt "when it became clear that the English people would not be led away (like the Poet Laureate) by the false romance of the attack." If the Bishop could have heard the ridicule with which the poem was received in many circles, and especially by the young, he might have thanked Mr. Austin for having done his best to destroy any element of romance the raid might have held. Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell says he scoffed openly at the "silly lyric" and there were many who did likewise.

Long before this, however, the public had grown tired of its elder poets, despairing of finding in them the fresh inspiration that the age demanded. Lovers of poetry were searching among the younger and less-known writers hoping to light upon authentic treasure. There was a touch of poetic excitement in the air, a sound of elusive music that men strained their ears to catch; it seemed as if at any moment might come a great outburst of song. It came, in quantity if not in quality. A host of minor poets arose, one following fast upon another. "In those days," says Mr. Arthur Waugh, "page three of the *Daily Chronicle* glittered every week with the discovery of genius." The bookshops were full of slim volumes each containing a few poems, usually lyrical, representing in most cases the entire output of their aspiring author, and these were eagerly bought and eagerly read. John Lane in particular established a reputation for the large number of such books that he published. The poetry was not great, but it was fresh and tuneful and often gay, and its variety of subject and treatment met the taste of a restless, questing generation.

It was a happy time for the ardent poetry lover, for he felt himself in the proud position of judge and arbiter among this crowd of candidates for his approval. He was not obliged to bow to the dictum of distinguished critics who had pronounced that the work of such and such a poet must be admired, for so far no authoritative

judgments had been given. He could come to the poems without prejudice, make his own choice, form his own opinions, and argue hotly with his friends without fear of this or that great man's opinion being quoted against him. He might even, if he would, form a salon such as that formed by Mrs. Ermyntrude Bending, of Beatrice Harraden's *Interplay*, for among such a crowd of minor poets he would surely find some willing to attend it; and he might easily be more fortunate than she was, and discover a luminary vastly brighter than her Mr. Theodore Theodore, who regarded himself as the new Swinburne of English literature, was regarded by her as a great genius, and by her young daughter as an affected ass.

"They say," wrote Grant Allen to his publisher, Mr. Longman, "that I discover a new poet once a fortnight. If so I must have begun six weeks ago, for my discoveries up to date are Watson, Davidson and Le Gallienne, and to tell you the truth I am not in the least ashamed of them." He had no need to be ashamed; if he had been called upon to defend his choice he would have found in each case, widely as the three poets differed, a large body of admirers to stand behind him. Readers who were not too "modern" in their tastes, and loved fine thoughts expressed in grave and stately verse, were reading with delight William Watson's volume called, from the longest poem it contained, *Wordsworth's Grave*. John Lane was prouder of Watson than of any other poet on his list. Richard Hutton, of the *Spectator*, had a "passionate appreciation" of his poetry; he was Lord Cromer's choice for the Laureateship. Mrs. Craigie placed Watson as a poet next below Swinburne. "I share your deep admiration of Watson's really great talent," she wrote to Mrs. Arthur Henniker, sister of Lord Crewe. Arnold Bennett, from being a lukewarm admirer, advanced to a fervour in which he could say, "If he isn't sometimes a great poet he comes near to being one."

John Davidson appealed to those who liked their poetry to have a strong moral purpose. He was intensely in earnest, a dour Scottish schoolmaster, who believed that his mission was to preach the doctrine that every man must work out his own salvation, nor allow himself to be hindered by the shams and conventions that beset his path. He loved nature and the simple life, and could sing happily of larks and streams and the "broom, green broom," but he put his greatest strength into his didactic works. His most popular poem was the *Ballad of a Nun*, which, as Mrs. Peel tells us, was

read by everybody; it received the hall-mark of success in being parodied by Sir Owen Seaman as the *Ballad of a Bun*. For the inner circle of his admirers the real Davidson seemed most fully revealed in his beautiful but terrible *Ballad of Heaven*, which told of a musician who devoted himself to the composition of a great work while his wife and child starved to death, and then, dying himself, found them again in heaven, "a radiant pair" who ran to meet him, "ruddy with haste and eager-eyed," while his own music sounded through space. "Even so," concluded the poem,

Nothing is lost that's wrought with tears:
The music that you made below
Is now the music of the spheres.

When Mr. Grant Allen turned from William Watson and John Davidson to the third of his discoveries he must have felt the gravity that they had induced quickly departing from him and his spirits rising in joyful sympathy with this new companion. For here was a happy singer whose themes were "golden girls and pearly dawns and apple-blossom and wind-blown locks," and whose verse was fresh and gay as a summer morning. Not that Le Gallienne was without depth or seriousness in his work; Mr. Lewis May, in his *John Lane and the Nineties*, quotes a sonnet which is full of tears. But that was written later, in the shadow of a great sorrow. His first book, *Volumes in Folio*, appeared in 1889, and John Lane, then at the beginning of his publishing career, introduced it to the notice of Mr. Lewis May's father as "the work of a young man of undoubted genius who was bound to set the Thames on fire, and whose face was the face of a Greek god." On the strength of this recommendation Mr. May bought two copies of the little book, which was produced as John Lane loved to produce the works that came from the Bodley Head, printed on handmade paper with untrimmed edges, and bound in blue-grey boards with a white panelled back. It had a large sale, as did other volumes that succeeded it. One critic said that Le Gallienne's poem, *What of the Darkness*, "wiped out Tennyson's lyrics." Le Gallienne's popularity as a poet was helped by his personal charm. Miss Katherine Bradley met him in 1892 at the house of George Meredith (of whom the young man was an adoring disciple) and described him as "charming—young, modest, spontaneous, very handsome, with some of the sweet sacredness that used to be about a poet in his youth.

A look of being delicately set apart." True, T. W. H. Crosland sneered at him. "Mr. Le Gallienne," said this unfriendly critic, "captured the heart of Kensington with his dainty vacuity"; he was "the delicate high priest of a little school of hot-pressed poetry." But Mr. Crosland, as was well known, delighted in satirizing the writers acclaimed by any considerable number of his fellow creatures; against his carpings may be set the verdict of Robert Louis Stevenson, who hailed Le Gallienne as "one who loved good literature and could make it." Le Gallienne was not, like Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, definitely attached to the Decadent group, though he toyed delicately and a little mischievously with its tenets. One of his prose works, *The Quest of the Golden Girl*, which is better remembered than his poems, was considered by many people flagrantly immoral. Miss G. B. Stern read it during what she calls her "pierrotic period," between the ages of fourteen and twenty, when she read also Ernest Dowson's *Pierrot of the Minute* and Laurence Housman's *Prunella*. "Surely," she says, "*The Quest of the Golden Girl* was something more than merely graceful and shocking." H. G. Wells's Mr. Polly read it, and dreamed of leaving his place behind the counter of a draper's shop and roaming the countryside in search of "romantic encounters"; such things, explains Mr. Wells, "happened in Chaucer and 'Bocashiew', with both of whose works Mr. Polly was familiar. They happened with extreme facility in Mr. Richard Le Gallienne's very detrimental book, *The Quest of the Golden Girl*."

There were very many other poets whose verses, daintily bound, were spread out temptingly in the bookshops, ready for discovery by Mr. Grant Allen or some other poetry lover. "The endless minor poet in an endless minor key, Gives the public his unnecessary rhymes," sang the *Oxford Magazine* in 1896. Among such profusion readers whose time was limited and who were not too confident of their taste in poetry found it difficult to make a choice; so that when, in 1892, an anthology appeared, called *The Book of the Rhymers' Club*, they felt that help had been given where help was needed. The *Rhymers' Club* was a society of poets mostly young, who met at the "Cheshire Cheese," in Fleet Street, and read their poems to one another. The anthology was by no means fully representative of the poetry of the day, since it contained examples of the work of twelve poets only—Ernest Dowson, Edwin Ellis, C. A. Greene, Lionel Johnson, Richard Le Gallienne, Victor

Plar, Ernest Radford, Ernest Rhys, T. W. Rolleston, Arthur Symonds, John Todhunter, and W. B. Yeats. Next year came the *Second Book of the Rhymers' Club*, with poems by the same writers, and also by A. C. Hillier.

Standing apart from this crowd of minor poets were three more notable figures, each of whom had his special appeal to the readers of the day. The first of these was Robert Bridges. His works were not published by John Lane, nor were they to be found in the alluring piles that drew the poetry lover to the bookseller's counter. They came, as Mr. E. E. Kellet has put it, "stealing from the private press of Daniel Beeching at Oxford." When the 'nineties began Mr. Bridges was forty-six years old, and had been writing poetry for nearly twenty years, but he was still almost unknown to the general public. For a long time his works were not published in the ordinary way but were only available in the "fastidious pamphlets" that came from a private press. These reached a small public, made up chiefly of scholars and men and women of fine literary taste. Coventry Patmore was one of Bridge's earliest admirers. Henry Newbolt read him as a young man, and said, "His poems suited me better than those of any other living poet." Mrs. Humphry Ward, in her novel, *Fenwick's Career*, written in 1906, but dealing with a period some thirty years earlier, tells how an artist was inspired to paint a great picture by having read aloud to him Bridge's *Elegy on a Lady Whom Grief for the Death of Her Betrothed Killed*, "a poem," says Mrs. Ward, "of which the new strange music was freshly in men's ears." Mary Gladstone, apparently, first heard of Bridges in 1885. "Read some of *Nero*," she wrote in her diary on March 12th, "a Shakespearian tragedy by one, Robert Bridges."

When, in 1890, a volume of *Shorter Poems* was issued to the general public, Miss Edith Cooper remarked unkindly that he had, without its aid, already achieved "a nasty little immortality," and Professor Sidgwick, with less asperity, replied, "Yes, before he has won fame his works are almost curiosities." He admired, he said, No. 16 of the *Shorter Poems*, beginning:—

Fire of heaven, whose starry arrow
Pierces the vale of timeless night.

For some time after he had read it "he could think of nothing else." He was indifferent to things about him. For the *Dramas* he entertains a sincere but cold respect."

Shorter Poems was followed in 1894 by another volume of verse, and, very slowly, Bridges became known to a wider circle of readers. Mr. Kellett says that when he was an undergraduate at Oxford it was the fashion among his little set to admire

the restraint and austerity of *Prometheus the Fire Giver*. We were very proud of our superiority to those elders who liked a little show of passion; and when we were informed that Bridges was perhaps a little cold, we answered, "It is the coldness of suppressed flame."

In strong contrast to Robert Bridges' gradual, unspectacular rise to a lasting fame was the career of another poet, Stephen Phillips. He had first attracted attention by his non-dramatic poem, *Christ in Hades*, which had won the prize of a hundred pounds offered by the *Academy* for the best volume of poems published during the year 1896. The second prize of fifty pounds was awarded to W. E. Henley, and those who knew Henley, and how little he liked playing second fiddle to anyone, awaited his thunder against the *Academy* and his denunciations of the successful competitor. Instead came full agreement with the decision and hearty congratulations. "I am proud," he wrote to Stephen Phillips, "to be in the same boat as the author of *Christ in Hades*."

Everywhere the new poet conquered, and when, in 1899, his first poetic drama, *Paolo and Francesca*, was produced, all London crowded to see it, and applauded it as a great and immortal work such as had not been seen since the days of Elizabeth. "London has seldom been excited by a theatrical event to the extent that *Paolo and Francesca* stirred it," wrote Major Chapman-Houston in his *Life of Sidney Low*, and the two plays that followed, *Herod* in 1900, *Ulysses* in 1902, were received with equal enthusiasm. "Suddenly out of a clear sky the poetic drama is upon us," wrote one critic; and another, "There is an enchantment about much of its melody to parallel which we must go back to Keats and his 'Magic casements opening on the foam, Of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn.' Phillips was compared to Sophocles and to Shakespeare, and was hailed as being in the true tradition of the immortals.

Not only the general public, who might have been expected to be carried away by the pomp and colour of Phillips's verse and by its easy melody, acclaimed him as a great poet, but men and women whose ear was true and whose sense of drama was keen and critical. "I hear that Stephen Phillips has written a wonderful play on Paolo

and Francesca de Rimini," wrote Anne Douglas Sedgwick to her friend, Mrs. Pitman. "Do you know Stephen Phillips's poems? You would love *Marpessa*." Lena Ashwell testified that his "beautiful poetic plays," with their "purple patches," made a deep impression on the public of the day. Sir Sidney Colvin thought very highly of Phillips and asked him often to his house, where G. K. Chesterton heard him read *Ulysses* aloud, but was not as deeply impressed as were most of his hearers. Few readers and playgoers were able so far to escape the enchantment of Phillips's verse as to give it serious criticism.

For a few more years Phillips remained ringed about by the golden glory that surrounds the true poet in the eyes of his following, and then, not suddenly but quite perceptibly, his halo faded. The cause was partly in himself, partly in the public. His was not the strong spirit that adulation could not harm. He grew slack, his inspiration wilted, the faults of over-fluency increased upon him. At the same time public taste was changing with the new century and the new reign. By the time that reign was ended the glorified poet had disappeared, and in his place was the disappointed, unhappy man, neglected and almost forgotten, going from one publishing house to another trying to sell his verses for a few shillings, turning more and more to strong drink as a consolation in his troubles, until his miserable death in 1915. Yet, prophesied Sir Sidney Colvin, "the day will come when Phillips will be recognized as having belonged by the gift of passion, by natural largeness of style and pomp and melody of rhythm and diction, as well as by intensity of imaginative vision in those fields where his imagination was really awake, to the great lineage and high tradition of English poetry."

It was towards the middle 'nineties, when the crop of minor poems was most plentiful, that literary society, and especially that distinguished part of it that gathered in the drawing-room of Mrs. Alice Meynell, began to talk of a new poet who, they affirmed with passion, was not of the minor order, but a great inspired singer, destined to immortality. For a time the public listened, unexcitedly but with interest, as it had listened so many times to news of heaven-sent genius, until some personal details concerning this new poet caught its attention. Mr. Wilfrid Meynell had, so the tale went, in February 1887 received by post an uninviting looking manuscript consisting of poems written on dirty scraps of rough

paper. With it was a letter signed "Francis Thompson," asking Mr. Meynell if he considered the poems worthy of publication in his magazine, *Merry England*, to address a letter to this effect to the author at Charing Cross Post Office; if not, to destroy the manuscript and take no further notice. Mr. Meynell put the manuscript aside, and in press of work forgot it for about six months. Then, recalling it, he read the poems, and with rising astonishment and delight recognized that here was a work of genius. He wrote at once to Charing Cross Post Office, but his letter remained unclaimed; the poet had clearly given up hope of an answer. All Mr. Meynell's attempts to find him were in vain until it occurred to him to publish one of the poems, *The Passion of Mary*, in his magazine. Then a letter came from the poet and Mr. Meynell invited him to call at his house. He came, and with a sharp and painful shock Mr. Meynell realized that the genius of whom he and his wife had been thinking with almost reverent admiration was a young man, haggard and emaciated, ragged and unkempt as a beggar, with no shirt beneath his miserable coat, and with his bare feet showing through his broken boots. He had, as Mr. Meynell learnt later, disagreed with his father as to the choice of a career, had left his home at Preston and had come to London and tried to live by his writing. But he had contracted the disastrous habit of opium taking and his strength and energy had failed. He had obtained a job in a boot shop but had lost it, had sold matches and newspapers in the street, and held horses, had been befriended by a prostitute, herself poor and near to starvation, had been miserable and destitute, and almost dying of hunger and cold.

Mr. Meynell took the unfortunate poet into his house and gave him the most devoted care, trying to restore his health, bodily, mental and spiritual. Improvement came very slowly, but the opium habit was partly conquered and Thompson gained enough strength to write, fitfully and with great effort, some of his finest poems. By 1893 poems sufficient to fill a small volume were ready. John Lane published it—a square book, bound in brown boards with golden circles, and with a frontispiece by Laurence Housman. For a time it had little success. The early reviews were on the whole adverse. "Is it poetry? Is it sense? Is it English?" asked the *Westminster Review*, referring to one of the poems, *The Judgment of Heaven*. Henley was in entire agreement with such criticism. "What a jackass is your Francis Thompson," he said to

Lewis Hind. There were many discerning readers, however, who shared Wilfrid Meynell's opinion of the high quality of the poems. Richard Le Gallienne reviewed them enthusiastically, declaring that they were "greater than any work by a new poet since Rossetti." "Thompson, if any living poet can now be said to be so, is a man of genius," pronounced Wilfrid Blunt. "I remember one day at Cambridge," says Maurice Baring, "buying a new book of verse by a man called Francis Thompson. Here, I thought, is another of the hundreds of new poets, but directly I caught sight of *The Hound of Heaven* I thought, 'Here is something different.'" The University as a whole took scant notice of Francis Thompson. "Cambridge had no great enthusiasm for new writers," says Mr. Baring.

The general public were repelled by just that "something different" which to the more discerning was an attraction. They glanced at the poems as they turned over the piles of new books, saw that they were mainly serious and on religious subjects, remembered perhaps that they had read in a newspaper review that Francis Thompson was "the poet of a small Catholic clique," and put the book down. But by and by, as the author's story began to be talked about, the little brown volume acquired a new interest. Curiosity led many people to read the poems, and there were few who, having read them, were not in some degree impressed. *The Hound of Heaven*, in particular, was recognized as authentic great poetry. "Since Gabriel's *Blessed Damozel* no mystical words have so touched me as *The Hound of Heaven*," declared Edward Burne-Jones. Even Henley became a convert when he had been induced to read the poems carefully.

When a further volume came in 1895 there was a large circle of readers ready to welcome it. The critics, moved by the strongly expressed opinion of men of taste and judgment, had changed their tune. Arnold Bennett's review in *Woman*, July 1895, helped greatly to bring this about. "I declare," he said,

that for three days after this book appeared I went about repeating snatches of it, snatches such as

The innocent moon that nothing does but shine,
Moves all the labouring surges of the world.

My belief is that Francis Thompson has a richer natural genius, a finer poetical equipment than any poet since Shakespeare. . . .

Well, please yourself what you think. But in time to come don't say I didn't tell you.

If Thompson had had the physical equipment of Shakespeare there might have been a chance for Arnold Bennett to have said, later on, "I told you so." But opium and starvation had broken down his health too completely for the almost passionate cherishing he received from his friends to avail. He was not capable of steady continuous work. The inspiration that created his poems tore his frail body. He published another volume in 1897, but by that time his strength was almost gone. Thereafter he attempted no great work. He lived for another ten years and wrote essays, reviews and biographies, and he died in 1907. "With Francis Thompson," said G. K. Chesterton, "we lose the greatest poetic energy since Browning."

He had left his mark on English readers. H. D. Traill had said in 1895, "A public to appreciate *The Hound of Heaven* is to me inconceivable," and William Archer had agreed. Yet by 1910, three years after Thompson's death, fifty thousand copies of the poem had been sold, and it was still being widely read and talked about. "Fancy your not knowing the *Hound of Heaven*! About the finest purely Christian poem ever written, don't you think?" wrote John Bailey in January 1910 to his friend, the Reverend F. G. Ellerton, who had only lately read it, and although Mr. Ellerton thought it too "literary" and not equal to Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*, he too was greatly impressed.

By that time the poetic impulse of the 'nineties had almost died away. Many of the poets who had been inspired by it were forgotten; and the country awaited another great revival.

CHAPTER VI

BOOKS AND SOCIAL QUESTIONS

LITERATURE with a "social purpose" is as old as *Piers Plowman*; in its modern popular form it may be said to have begun with Charles Dickens. All through the early part of the reign of Queen Victoria when the English people were beginning to realize that the change in industrial conditions made necessary large and drastic reforms in the social order, the poets and novelists joined with the prophets, like Carlyle and Ruskin, to try what books could do in helping on the work. They appealed to the hearts and imaginations of their readers and so had a great part in bringing about that state of passionate national consciousness in which abuses were abolished, new laws passed, and individual effort directed to manifold works of charity that would lighten the heavy burden borne by the poor. As the reign went on the new forces that were gathering strength made themselves felt in this, as in all other departments of the national life. Men were tending to become scientifically minded. The laws underlying the operation of natural forces were being revealed to them and they were learning that these forces could be directed and made to serve the will of man. They were beginning to realize, too, how much patient research and unwearied collection of data went to the discovery of one of these laws. To postulate a similar system of cause and effect and a similar necessary careful investigation in social matters was but a step, and the reformers set seriously to work, not to attack the manifestations of particular evils, but to search for the general laws by breaking which these evils had come to pass.

The idea was not a new one. Bentham, Ricardo, Stuart Mill, and others had attempted in the early years of the nineteenth century to formulate an exact science of economics in which cause and effect were clearly related, and to apply this with strict logic to human affairs. But their system appealed to only a comparatively small number of English people. It was too purely academic, and paid too little regard to the frailties and inconsistencies of the ordinary man; so that although the works of these writers, of John Stuart Mill in particular, were still read and highly esteemed, they had not reached the great public which can only be strongly

moved by works that appeal to the heart and the imagination as well as to the intellect.

This great public was, at the end of the century, better prepared to receive the results of scientific investigation than it had been at the beginning. It was not only that those whom we may consider as belonging to the educated classes had, in matters relating to science, minds more open and unprejudiced than those of their fathers. Education had advanced. Practically everybody could read. Where before could have been found only here and there a group of working men and women ready to respond to an appeal to their intelligence there were now, in all parts of the country, many groups eager to understand and investigate the causes of the evils that oppressed them, and their enthusiasm infected their less intelligent fellows. There was what seemed a hopeful and growing tendency for the working man to look upon himself as a reasonable co-operator in social reform, not merely a recipient of its benefits. So that there was a large public waiting for those new writers who were setting out to deal with poverty and unhappiness not as being curable simply by pity and loving-kindness, but by the ordering of social conditions in accordance with scientific law.

The new writers, except Karl Marx, were the product of the Victorian age. Its humanity, its sympathy, its emotionalism—its sentimentality, if you will—had affected them too strongly to allow of their looking upon the organization of society merely as an interesting scientific problem. There was warmth, even passion, a regard for personality and a sympathy with human weakness in their books; there was also much that was extravagant, unpractical, and foolish. Yet even readers who were in entire disagreement with the principles advocated in some particular work, in most cases freely acknowledged that it did something towards strengthening the national impulse to strive for better things. Among both young and old this impulse was working with power. For many of the new generation it provided the ideal for which they were seeking. To make the world a happier and more beautiful place and to give everyone a due share of that beauty and happiness seemed to them the highest aim a man could set before himself. It was with a passionate belief that organized effort, working in accordance with scientific principles, could lead to its attainment that the readers of the late Victorian age turned to the books in which they hoped to find those principles laid down.

One of the first of such books was *Progress and Poverty*, by Henry George, a man of English descent who had settled in Philadelphia, where his book had originally been published. It began by calling attention to the fact that in those countries where the arts of civilization had made the greatest progress, poverty had not, as should naturally have followed, decreased. The reason for this was, it argued, that the holding of land as private property affected adversely the distribution of wealth. The remedy was the nationalization of the land, and a scheme to effect this was clearly set forward and advocated with much warmth and eloquence. The book was written in a pleasant and attractive style, without technicalities to discourage the ordinary reader, and it put its case very persuasively.

Progress and Poverty was published in England in 1881. For some months little notice was taken of it; then a long and favourable notice in *The Times* brought it into prominence. Soon it was having a large sale and reaching those centres where schemes of social reform were being most eagerly discussed. The Reverend Stewart Headlam, one of the most enthusiastic workers in the cause of Socialism, received it as "a new social evangel." He worked untiringly to make it known, expounded its principles to the religious-political Guild of St. Matthew which he had founded, and was delighted when he heard that it was being read in the home of Archbishop Tait. Canon Barnett read it, and introduced it later for discussion in his Working Men's Club at Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel. Randall Davidson, Dean of Windsor, was much struck by it and induced the Queen to read it; she also was greatly impressed, though she "found it difficult." Philip Wicksteed, Mary Gladstone, Edward Burne-Jones, Mark Rutherford and Lord Grey of Fallodon are among those who have left it on record that the book interested them deeply.

Scott Holland and the group of young Anglo-Catholics whom he had inspired with his own humanitarian spirit found inspiration in *Progress and Poverty*. "It forced us on," said Scott Holland, "to new thinking." That, perhaps, was the greatest value of the book. Its arguments and its proposals were open to much criticism; many men of wide political experience and clear judgment pronounced them altogether unsound; but its stimulating effect few denied. Professor James Stuart, who was at the head of Colman's mustard factory and knew much of the social conditions of working men,

thought that it had "a good many economic fallacies and the remedy has much to condemn it. But it will wake people up and make a good many people feel uncomfortable who ought to feel so." Lord Snell says that he was "one of the many thousands of young men whose political and social views were greatly stimulated by Henry George's famous book, *Progress and Poverty*." He read it several times and admired it greatly, but he "never gave to the theory of the single tax the allegiance that entitled one to a place among the elect of that somewhat assertive faith." The Radical Mr. Joseph Chamberlain praised it, though with reservations; the Conservative party, as a whole, repudiated it. W. H. Mallock was one of many Conservative members who wrote and spoke against it. Arnold Toynbee was convinced that it was a harmful book, and in his lectures to working men, at Whitechapel and elsewhere, he tried to expose its fallacies, but found his audiences usually unsympathetic. Cardinal Manning thought the book gave "grave cause for condemnation." The general view of the Socialist Party was perhaps best put by Henry Hyndman, founder of the Social Democratic Federation:—

I saw the really extraordinary gaps in the work, and its egregious blunderings in economics, but I also recognized . . . the seductive attractiveness for the sympathetic, half-educated mob of its brilliant high-class journalese. I understood as I thought that it would induce people to think about economic problems who never could have been brought to read economic books pure and simple; and although I saw . . . that taxation of land values can be no solution whatever of the social question, I felt that agitation against any form of private property was better than the stereotyped apathy that prevailed all around us.

Huxley could see no good in the book at all. "Did you ever read Henry George's book, *Progress and Poverty*?" he wrote to Knowles, the editor of the *Nineteenth Century*, in 1889. "It is more damned nonsense than poor Rousseau's blether. And to think of the popularity of the book."

"I was bitten with Henry George about the same time that Headlam was," says Mr. Bernard Shaw, "but I went on from Henry George to Karl Marx; Headlam stayed where I had begun." A considerable body of readers went on with Mr. Shaw, but most stayed behind with Mr. Headlam. Karl Marx had been banished from Prussia in 1849, and had written his famous book,

Das Kapital, while living in great poverty in England. For a good many years the book was scarcely known in this country except to a very small band of followers. Only gradually by means of translations and abridgments and commentaries did some knowledge of its principles reach a larger public. Henry Hyndman read it in the French edition in 1880, and even he, although, later, he became one of the most enthusiastic preachers of the Marxian gospel, "did not at the time grasp all the significance of his theories, which, indeed," he said, "are rarely apparent to the student who reads him for the first time." *Das Kapital* denounced not only the private ownership of land, but private ownership of any kind of property whatever. Its theories were discussed with much interest and excitement by groups of advanced young people in the newly formed political societies. Lord Snell as a young man was strongly impressed by Marx and his books. "His influence on world affairs," he says, "was perhaps destined to be more profound and lasting than that of any other political personality throughout the nineteenth century." In England, however, that influence was not as strongly felt as in other parts of Europe. Many who at first received the Marxian doctrines with enthusiasm decided later that they did not stand the test of experience. Mrs. Humphry Ward, in *Marcella*, published in 1894, shows her heroine reading the works of Marx and Morris and founding upon them a scheme of social service which broke down lamentably when put into practice. Richard Remington, of H. G. Wells's *New Machiavelli*, read Marx, along with Morris and other socialistic writers when he went up to Cambridge in 1895, and formed from this reading

a picture of a splendid Working Man cheated out of his innate glorious possibilities and presently to arise and dash this scoundrelly and scandalous system of private ownership to fragments,

but found himself presently forced to discard this vision, realizing that the splendid Working Man did not exist, and that there was no sovereign and immediate remedy for the ills of the world.

Both Karl Marx and Henry George did good work—if it was only by arousing opposition—in helping to kindle and keep alive a generous sympathy with the oppressed and the suffering, but they did little to bring this feeling to a practical issue. Men and women who were in close daily contact with the people whom these schemes were designed to benefit felt that it was impossible

to wait until—if ever—the social millennium that they promised should arrive. Much was being done by private effort; but the workers, realizing how huge was the problem, felt that measures on a larger scale were demanded. In 1883 there appeared an anonymous tract, called *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, which gave some striking facts and figures, especially with regard to the number of the homeless, and the need for better housing conditions in London and other great cities. The attention that this excited showed that concern for the poor was deep and widespread. Oxford, where Samuel Barnett was already urging his plan for a crusade in aid of the people of East London, was strongly moved by it. Montague Butler, Headmaster of Harrow, preached a sermon at St. Mary's Church holding a copy of *The Bitter Cry* in his hand. "God grant," he said, "that it may not startle only, but that it may be read and pondered by thoughtful brains as well as by feeling hearts." He prayed especially that from Oxford, "this great home of eager thought and enlightened action and generous friendship," the response might be full and enthusiastic; and he was not disappointed. The members of the University felt that here was a call that could not be disregarded; and one result of their activity was the establishment of Toynbee Hall, Whitechapel, in 1885.

Among the general public also *The Bitter Cry* caused much stirring of hearts and conscience, and its terrible significance was still more closely brought home to them by a series of articles on it by W. T. Stead in the *Daily News*, and another series by George R. Sims, called "How the Poor Live," in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. It was clear that something must be done and done quickly. But as soon as the matter began to be seriously considered it became evident that much fuller and more accurate information as to the people's needs was necessary if the measures taken were to be effective, and this could be obtained only by a careful and systematic investigation.

An attempt at such an investigation was undertaken by the Social Democratic Federation, at the instance of Henry Hyndman. It was carefully made and statistics were gathered from a large area; and one of the conclusions arrived at was that 28 per cent of the wage-earning classes were receiving pay that could not supply them with enough of the necessities of life to keep them in health.

The publication of this result attracted a great deal of notice.

It especially interested Mr. Charles Booth, the head of an important shipping firm and a member of Parliament. For many years he had given much time and thought to the study of social conditions. He had attended the meetings of the Social Democratic Federation, though he did not agree with its politics, and he believed that 28 per cent was an over-estimate of the people actually in want. In order to arrive at a really reliable result a much more searching and extended investigation was necessary, and in 1889 Mr. Booth put such an investigation in hand. He got together a large body of helpers, including two hundred and fifty School Board visitors whose work made them acquainted with the homes of the children attending the schools, also employers of labour, trade union officials, workmen, clergy, doctors, teachers and social workers. Toynbee Hall gave him great help, and other social organizations co-operated with him gladly.

Before any results of this inquiry were available there came, in 1890, another book dealing with the life of the poor. This was *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, by William Booth, General of the Salvation Army, assisted by W. T. Stead. It described the condition of the poor as it had been revealed by the experience of those members of the Army who had worked in the worst city slums and among the most depraved and the most pitiable of the population of our great towns. The terrible story was told with the journalistic skill of which W. T. Stead was master, but also with the simplicity, downrightness and burning sense of pity that came from a first-hand knowledge of the ills that it described. Some readers were superior and scornful, and contented themselves with calling it crude and sensational; some, more tolerant, smiled a little and passed it by as a mere sentimental outburst. But there were many who were impressed by its sincerity, its brotherly compassion and its firm faith that if man would do his part, God would certainly bless his efforts and work effectively through him, so that a miracle of healing would end the nation's ills. Very plainly and practically General Booth put forward his scheme of regeneration. First, City Colonies were to be established, temporary institutions to which men, women and children—drunkards, criminals, the lost and degraded as well as the destitute—were to be brought as they were discovered by the Army's "Slum Sisters" and other workers. There they were to be cleansed, tended, encouraged and above all taught something of God and His

redeeming love. After a time they were to be sent to one of the Farm Colonies which were to be established in different parts of the country. They were to be taught to work on the land, and all the arts connected with farming and home-making. At the end of a period of training there, General Booth had no doubt that faith and love and the grace of God would have worked the miracle and that as decent, God-fearing men and women they would be ready to be transplanted to the Overseas Colonies which were to be established on the great uninhabited tracts of land in Canada, Australia and South Africa. Here they were to live, guided and governed at first by responsible officers and aided in the establishment of industries and trade, but developing into self-governing, self-supporting communities, worthy and valuable members of the Dominion of which they formed part.

All this would cost a great deal of money, and General Booth asked to be entrusted with the necessary sum. For the Overseas Colonies State aid would be asked; for the rest he would depend on the contributions of those whose hearts were moved with pity for the dwellers in Darkest England and who had faith to see in this scheme a way in which they might pass out to light.,

The book made a strong appeal to many people whose consciences were oppressed by the thought of the misery around them, and who felt themselves helpless to do anything adequate towards relieving such an enormous need. They would willingly give money if by so doing the burden could be lifted. But could it? Could General Booth really accomplish the great work he was ready to enter on with such confidence? "Who shall forbid him?" said Cardinal Manning. "If sheep are lost it is the shepherd's fault." Francis Thompson, who knew so well the bitterness of poverty, was enthusiastic for the scheme, and wrote an article commending it, which was published in Wilfrid Meynell's magazine, *Merrie England*, in January 1891. There were others, as sympathetic but more cautious and far-seeing, who could not feel satisfied, especially concerning the financial side of the scheme. "Suspicious, I fear, economically," said Mary Gladstone, who with her father was reading the book in November 1890, "but more perhaps because of the vast scheme all hanging on one man. I am all for his having loads of money given him and a free hand to see what he can do, if it doesn't mean withdrawing money from other old, less showy charities and good works." Archibald

Marshall of Cambridge University told Miss Bradley and her niece that he thought the scheme sound and was subscribing to it himself, but did not advise others to do so because there was always the chance that the man by some gross blunder should spoil the whole. Most of the authorities on economics, including Professor Bosanquet, viewed the scheme unfavourably. Huxley was definitely against it. When a lady who was ready to subscribe £1,000 asked his advice he told her that he was convinced it was unwise "to create an organization whose absolute obedience to an irresponsible leader might some day become a serious danger to the State." Moreover, he considered it financially unsound, since no guarantees were provided; and he believed that much of the work proposed was already being done by existing bodies. He wrote to *The Times* expressing these views and aroused thereby a good deal of hostility among readers who had been greatly moved by General Booth's book. Huxley's well-known views on religion inclined many people to take his opposition as an attack upon the Christian faith which *In Darkest England* so fervently upheld, and as a personal charge against General Booth. He was accused of hard-heartedness, materialism, bigotry, spite. "What an ass a man is to try to prevent his fellow-creatures from being humbugged!" he said. "Surely I am old enough to know better. I have not been so well abused for an age."

In the end a great deal of money was subscribed—the profit on the sale of *In Darkest England* alone amounted to £7,838—but not enough to carry out the scheme in its entirety. The fund was put in the hands of a committee, and applied to the Army's work of rescue and settlement.

In 1892 came the first volume of Charles Booth's great survey, *Life and Labour of the London People*—to be completed in seventeen volumes, the last of which was published in 1903. It quickly became and has remained the great storehouse of information to which anyone who wishes to study the social history of the period must go. Statesmen, Government officials, employers of labour, social workers, all who were interested in the welfare of the people, soon learned to look to it for guidance. Randall Davidson, when he was appointed to the bishopric of Rochester, studied it carefully that he might understand something of the social conditions of the district to which he was going. Bishop Talbot grieved over the confirmation that it gave to the charge brought against the Church

that she had failed to reach the working classes, and exhorted his clergy to take the warning to heart. At Toynbee Hall the copy which Charles Booth himself had presented to the settlement "with affectionate and grateful words" was constantly in use.

The conclusions drawn from the facts given in *Life and Labour* went to show that the percentage of London people living in actual poverty had been under- not over-estimated by the Social Democratic Federation. It was actually not twenty-eight but thirty. Here was a plain fact, the importance of which could not be gainsaid. Its effect in various directions was great. As far as books were concerned it quickened the production, from all sides, of literature dealing with social questions. Much of this was technical and appealed only to a small public, but it was read eagerly by the intelligent few who were ready to give serious study to the understanding of national problems. Much was political, some highly controversial. The *Clarion*, the Socialist newspaper founded in 1891 and edited by Robert Blatchford, published in book form, with the title of *Merrie England*, a series of articles which he had written for the paper, and in which, under such headings as "The Life of the Worker," "The Bitter Cost of a Bad System," "Who Makes the Wealth and Who Gets It," "The Rights of the Individual," "The Survival of the Fittest," he gave a picture of England as she was and England as she might be if certain reforms were effected which would enable her once more to be called "Merrie." The book was issued at a shilling, and of this edition twenty thousand copies were sold. Later a penny edition was published and reached a sale of three quarters of a million in less than a year. "For every convert made by *Das Kapital* there were a hundred made by *Merrie England*," said the *Manchester Guardian*.

The novelists and the poets, too, were beginning to concern themselves with social questions considered in the light that the new ideas in science and economics was shedding upon them. William Morris had turned from visions of the past to visions of the future, and instead of beautiful verse romances was writing in almost equally beautiful prose of the Utopia which his own fervent, idealistic Socialism might one day create. His *A Dream of John Ball* was published in 1888 and in 1891 came his *News from Nowhere*. Mrs. Humphry Ward, in her novel, *Marcella* (1896), speaks of him as "once the poet of love and dreamland, 'the idle singer of an empty day,' now seer and prophet, the herald

of an age to come in which none shall possess though all shall enjoy." Ellen Alden, in her book, *Middle Age*, says, "William Morris had become a hero and a god." "He was and is the leader of the world's return to its youth," declared George Wyndham. When Morris died in October 1891 Mr. Wyndham wrote to Wilfrid Blunt, "With infinite regret I have just read of William Morris's death. One by one the Stars are extinguished."

On the Conservative side the two chief writers were W. H. Mallock and Mrs. Humphry Ward. Mr. Mallock was a member of Parliament and had written articles and pamphlets opposing the theories of *Progress and Poverty*, and other Socialist proposals. His novels, *The Old Order Changes*, *The Individualist*, etc., were on similar lines. Mrs. Humphry Ward's chief contributions were *Marcella*, published in 1896, and its sequel, *Sir George Tressady*, which came two years later. H. G. Wells in his *New Machiavelli* talks of the "little shoal of young women who were led into politico-philanthropic activities by the influence of the early novels of Mrs. Humphry Ward—the *Marcella* crop." Like Mr. Hurrell, Mrs. Ward set forward the Conservative view of the way in which our social troubles could be met.

More influential than any of these were the works of the Russian novelists, especially of Tolstoi, translations of which were now reaching the English public. They opened up a new world of thought, and introduced new ideals of social morality. They were not widely read, and it was only slowly that some idea of their purport spread among the general public; but on a small circle their influence was enormous.

The impulse given by this social movement of the 'nineties was strong and lasting. It worked effectively in politics, in economics, in public administration and in individual effort. But in popular literature it weakened and almost died out. The main body of the Edwardian public did not want to read about poverty and misery, except when these were presented in a humorous or a sensational fashion; it wanted to be entertained rather than edified, to have conclusions on controversial subjects presented to it neatly labelled and ready for use, not to have to dig these out for itself. Some of the novelists still endeavoured to keep alive interest in social questions, and this they did, for the most part, in one of two ways. One was the way of John Galsworthy. This presented a moving picture of the evils and miseries arising from poverty, but suggested

no remedy, implied, in fact, that there was no remedy, but that the poor and the rich must continue to regard each other across the gulf that divided them in a helplessness that is too despairing for hostility. *Fraternity*, published in 1909, presents, perhaps, most completely Galsworthy's point of view. It was attacked in the Press for its Socialistic tendencies, and regarded by many people as extravagant and visionary. The *Saturday Review* said, "In the guise of a novel Mr. Galsworthy has produced a very dangerous and revolutionary book. *Fraternity* is nothing more nor less than an embittered attack upon our Social system. . . . It is quite unworthy of the author of *The Country House* and *The Man of Property*." It is a little difficult to see how a book which appears to demonstrate the futility of action of any kind can be called revolutionary, or one so full of troubled sympathy with both sides can be called embittered. Canon Barnett's criticism shows a finer understanding of its spirit. "It is a remarkable book," he said, but fails because "it has not a sense of humour, and no suggestion is given of the souls that are in touch and make the music that can be heard. Each soul is isolated." Galsworthy himself was fully aware of the criticism that called his books ineffectual and uninspiring. He was often charged, he said, with "not showing the way to heaven," but, nevertheless, he believed that he did

set up a process in people's spirits which makes them rather more alive to the Pharisaism, sense of property, intolerance and humbug which stand in the way of sympathy between man and man.

This, doubtless, he did, though the unrelieved gloom of his outlook upon social evils depressed and alienated many readers, especially those who knew by actual contact something of the conditions of life among the poor. "I perhaps build too much on my slight experience," said Charles Booth, after the publication of the first volume of *Life and Labour*, "but I see nothing improbable in the general view that the simple natural lives of the working people tend to their own and their children's happiness more than the artificial, complicated existence of the rich."

The second way was the way of H. G. Wells. Here there was little sympathy but much irritation at a world that refused to order itself according to a plan prescribed by the author's particular brand of Socialism—a plan which, if followed, would infallibly cure all ills. It was not a question of brotherhood and under-

standing between man and man, it was a question of sanitation, cleanliness, order, the equal distribution of goods and the complete mechanical obedience of the entire population to the ordinances made for its benefit. We must bustle about, making a new world out of the old, ruthlessly clearing out rubbish, even though in doing so we swept away the things man loved best. We must put each man in his allotted place, assuring him that even if he felt unhappy and uncomfortable there, it was all for his good, and necessary to a society run on the best economic and scientific lines, where everything was trim and tidy, and no concession was made to inconvenient human weaknesses and emotions. Mr. Wells had gained a large public by his scientific romances, and when he turned to sociology most of his public, for a time, followed him. He had a forcible and sometimes an amusing way of putting things which provided considerable entertainment even in such books as *New Worlds for Old* which were not novels, but Socialistic tracts. Only a few readers took him seriously. "If you want to see the Socialistic case presented plausibly and attractively read H. G. Wells's *New Worlds for Old* and his *Anticipations*," said Sidney Low. Galsworthy thought this work "a nice broad book of religious merit," and Scott Holland said, "There is not one syllable from cover to cover that gives the reader a moral jar. The tone and temper are perfect throughout."

Mr. Wells could, as Mr. Galsworthy could not, contemplate the possibility of the emergence of a perfect State, where the ideal should be reached and men live happy ever after. He gave a picture of this state in *A Modern Utopia*, published in 1905. It is a very characteristic Wellsian paradise. It does not, like *News from Nowhere*, present a transformed England, where beauty and peace, goodwill and happy freedom rule in the life of every man and woman, and therefore rule in the State. A drastically reorganized and intricate society could not, as Mr. Wells said, be represented as functioning in such a restricted area, subject to the influences of the effete civilizations around it.

Out beyond Sirius, far in the depths of space, beyond the flight of a cannon ball flying for a billion years, beyond the range of unaided vision, blazes the star which is our Utopia's sun.

Here a vast population, dragooned into mechanical conformity, exists to show how a constitution, benevolent, but brand new and

arbitrarily imposed, can take away from life its joy and its romance. Henry Nevinson described the powers by which H. G. Wells would reform the world as "mechanical and devastating,"

developing and fertilizing like the powers of a steam plough, grinding and cleaving along its way through stones and roots and flowers, remorselessly turning up the fallow, destroying the slow and sometimes beautiful growth of ages, and industriously fertilizing the ground for the future.

The steam plough had been hard at work in *A Modern Utopia*, with results that few readers whole-heartedly admired. Edith Nesbit disliked the book at first but on re-reading it wrote to H. G. Wells, "I don't disagree as much as I thought. And I think it's a splendid book." Canon Barnett read it soon after its publication, and called it "an attempt to incorporate modern notions of development with an ideal." "It is not very suggestive," he said, "there is a want of a link between things as they are and things as he imagines them"; which, as G. K. Chesterton pointed out in *Heretics*, written in that same year, is the weakness of all Utopias.

They take the greatest difficulty of man and assume it to be overcome, and then give an elaborate account of the overcoming of the smaller ones. They first assume that no man will want more than his share, and then are very ingenious in explaining whether his share will be delivered by motor-car or balloon.

There was one book that was being widely read at this time which was neither after the manner of Galsworthy nor the manner of H. G. Wells. Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* had been published in 1872, but its quality had been recognized by only a few discerning readers such as Sir George Trevelyan and Mr. Bernard Shaw. For more than twenty years Butler's books were almost entirely neglected by the general public. In the 'nineties came signs of a growing recognition of their merits; and after his death in 1902 a sudden rage for them began. He was then so extravagantly praised as to annoy those who from the beginning had had a just appreciation of his works. His description of the imaginary state of Erewhon had a fine devastating irony which gave keen enjoyment to readers of a certain intellectual type while the general public were diverted by the picture of a country in which all accepted rules and standards were shown upside down. Miss Berta

Ruck says that her father and mother "often quoted the paradox that you could not help being wicked but it was a crime to be ill." Many people denounced the book as an embittered attack on the Christian religion, tending to undermine the faith of its readers. Mr. Frederick Anstey says that he first read *Erewhon* in a boat on the backs at Cambridge, while he was an undergraduate. "It made a deep impression on me, for until then, although I was anything but religiously minded, it had never occurred to me to question the orthodox creed." Everybody acknowledged the brilliance of its wit, and most readers were conscious of an underlying ironical meaning; but few accepted it for what Butler meant it to be—a scathing indictment of the stagnation and mental stupor of a self-satisfied generation. It needed a greater shock than Butler could give to stir the Edwardian age from its luxurious complacency.

CHAPTER VII

BOOKS FROM RUSSIA

FOR the Englishman of the early nineteenth century Russian literature did not exist. Only a few Englishmen knew even the names of the chief Russian writers; fewer still had read any of their works. There were no popular translations, and, except for a scholar here and there, the Russian language seemed almost as remote and as negligible as the dialects of the South Sea Islanders. When, in the early 'sixties, the Golden Age of literature dawned in Russia, England remained uninterested. No premonition came to her that the books then being produced were to have a profound influence on English thought and English literature.

Then, in the early 'eighties some strange names began to be heard in England—Ivan Turgenieff, Leo Tolstoi, Fyodor Dostoevsky. Some enthusiasts had discovered these great Russian writers and were talking about them. Soon enthusiasm produced translations, poor and unattractive at first, but sufficient to convince the few curious readers who took them up that here was something strange and new and worth their attention. Turgenieff came first. It was chiefly through Turgenieff, says Mr. Maurice Baring, that Europe discovered Russian literature. Mr. Baring compares him to Tennyson; he had "something mid-Victorian about him." Nevertheless English readers did not find his books easy reading. The way of life described was so very different from anything they were familiar with; the characters had such odd and unpronounceable names; the writer's standpoint was sometimes so startlingly unlike that of an ordinary Englishman that it required a real mental effort to understand it. Turgenieff made no great sensation in England and it was only slowly that knowledge of his works spread. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fawcett read his *Virgin Soil* about 1884 and were enthusiastic about it. George Gissing was another early admirer. "Tourgeniff" (the name is variously spelt), he said, "is a man I glory in."

It was not until the 'nineties were well on their way that Turgenieff's public showed a rapid increase, and this was largely because an adequate translation of his complete works became at length available. "The last volumes of a charming translation of

Turgenieff, by Mrs. Constance Garnett, came out a fortnight ago," wrote Joseph Conrad to a relative in Poland, Christmas 1898, as one recording a literary event of some importance. Its importance soon became apparent. The time was ripe for such a translation. The eager impatient young people of the 'nineties fell hopefully upon this new writer whose strange name seemed to promise a novel sensation. Young Anne Douglas Sedgwick was one interested reader and John Galsworthy was another. Arnold Bennett read *Virgin Soil* while he was yet in his twenties. "There is no doubt in my mind," he said, "that Turgenieff is the greatest master of the modern novel." Most literary critics placed *Virgin Soil* highest among Turgenieff's works, although, judging by the sales, *Fathers and Sons* was the favourite with the general reading public.

Following closely on Turgenieff came Tolstoi, and with him the Russian novel took on a new importance and significance. With Turgenieff it had been a thing of beauty and wonder; with Tolstoi it was a compelling force. The feeling aroused by his works was so strong as to be oppressive. Over and over again in the comments of the readers of the day this experience is recorded. Anthony Hope expressed something of the extraordinary compulsion that Tolstoi puts upon his readers, forcing them to respect his point of view even if they do not accept it, when, after reading *War and Peace*, he said:—

What a man! And what an unscrupulous use of his powers to make one take all that! The Russians seem to give away all other novelists, to show them up as mere inventors of stories as against chroniclers, men who have seen and known all the truth and tell it. Against this, even extreme length is a small and probably necessary drawback.

War and Peace was Tolstoi's first great novel, written in 1865 and founded on his experiences as a soldier in the Crimean War. He had written some years before a series of stories and sketches which were afterwards incorporated in the novel. "Very many years ago," wrote Sir George Trevelyan, in 1912,

before the ordinary Englishman had ever heard of Tolstoi, I read *The Cossacks* in a yellow-backed English translation, I almost think without the name of the author, and thought it wonderfully romantic and charming. I have since read it several times in French; but I have read still oftener the three wonderful pieces that are

usually bound up with it, the scenes from the siege of Sebastopol . . . the raw material of the wonderful battle pieces in *La Guerre et la Paix*. They are the best account of war ever written and that ever will be written; the best that ever Tolstoi wrote in any department; and you know what that means.

An English translation of *War and Peace* came from Vizetelly's in 1886; another and a better one, by N. H. Dole, was published in 1897. The first was in three closely printed volumes, the second in four, and a good many people who were sufficiently interested to look through these were daunted by the excessive length of the story and declined to undertake the formidable task of reading it. Others started bravely, but the realism and passion with which Tolstoi told his tale proved too much for them, and they put the volumes by. His books were not for those readers who liked mild sentiment and happy endings; nor were they for the super-sensitive who, while appreciating their great qualities, suffered acutely in reading them. "I can't afford to read Tolstoi," said Edward Burne-Jones, "and there's many another melancholy splendid thing in the world I can't be trusted with."

But even with these readers eliminated, *War and Peace* had a considerable public. It treated of subjects that were of intense interest to many people, and those who read it talked about it eagerly, until some idea of its contents—its denunciation of war and its advocacy of the doctrine of non-resistance—spread among readers in general. William Morris read it in 1888. He, like his friend Burne-Jones, usually avoided books that made him unhappy, but the interest he felt in this one overcame his dread of its effects. He read it, he said, "with much approbation but little enjoyment, and yet (to take the horse round to the other side of the cart) with a good deal of satisfaction." Morris, with many others among those who held the Socialist doctrines he had advocated for so many years, felt his interest in the works of Tolstoi increased by his respect for their author. Tolstoi, although a rich man, was attempting to live like the peasants on his estate, going to work with them in the early morning and labouring all day in his fields. But he felt after a time that this experiment was not entirely successful. To live as a poor man while he was actually a rich one meant unreality and incompleteness. In 1888, therefore, he made over all his possessions to his wife, and although he still lived with his family he transformed himself as far as possible into the peasant

he wished to be. This great act of renunciation touched the hearts and imagination of the English people, and Tolstoi was given the honour due to the man who voluntarily faces hardship and deprivation for conscience' sake. Englishmen saw in him an example of Socialism carried to its logical conclusion and approved or deplored according to their own convictions, but few questioned the sincerity of his action. Interest in him meant interest in his books, and readers became more ready to give them the close attention they demanded.

Tolstoi's second great novel, *Anna Karenina*, which he had written in 1876, was by this time circulating in England. It gained a wider public and more general popularity than *War and Peace*. Its story was more interesting, more human, less overshadowed by its thesis; the heroine was a living, faulty woman who went grandly towards her tragic end. George Moore, although he was not in sympathy with Tolstoi, allowed that *Anna Karenina* was the greatest novel ever written; Wilfrid Blunt gave it an equally high place but put *War and Peace* beside it. "There is no one, *no one* like Tolstoi," wrote Anne Douglas Sedgwick, after re-reading the book; "to me no one creates life as he does, the essential, the wonderful, the tragic and beautiful things of life in the apparently trivial and commonplace things." Miss Ethel Smyth and Mrs. T. P. O'Connor were also among those who read and admired. Galsworthy, when he had finished *Anna Karenina*, was so full of admiration that he felt he must unburden himself of some of it. He sat down and wrote to Edward Garnett an enthusiastic letter in which he placed Tolstoi beside Shakespeare, though with an art that was all his own. Mrs. Wilfrid Ward cited the book as a supreme example of tragedy arising out of character:—

From Anna's smile when she first appears leaving the railway carriage at Moscow to the last glimpse of Anna's dead face in the ghastly tragedy of the railway station at the end there has been no necessity of fate, no overwhelming pressure of external circumstance, it has been the awful history of the corruption of character.

The book admittedly made painful reading, and to many people the painful side was the most apparent. Mary Gladstone, after she had read the first volume, wrote, "Very clever and exciting, but——"; and when she had finished the story:—

A wretched, melancholy, tragic novel with marvellously delicate human insight, but surely, I earnestly trust, with too low a view of our nature.

William Morris would not read it. "I don't think I shall tackle *Anna Karenina*," he said. But there was beauty in *Anna Karenina* as well as tragedy, and some people who, like Hugh Walpole's Harmer John, loved beauty above all things, saw that most clearly of all. Harmer John read a passage that described a night scene in the open country, and "savouried a moment of exquisite pleasure. . . . He straightened himself, looking about the room like a man in a dream. 'Ah, that's good,' he thought, 'That life is mine. That is very true life.' "

Other novels followed, *Powers of Darkness*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *The Death of Ivan Ilitch*, and, most famous of all, *Resurrection*. Tolstoi wrote also for the people among whom he lived the short parable-stories which put the main articles of his creed in simple form, and many of which were disapproved by the Government as tending to make the peasants discontented. They were widely read in England by a good many people who found the novels too difficult or too painful, as well as by the true Tolstoi lovers. Canon Barnett and his wife read them, and were "much fascinated by their delicacy and insight." To many gentle and devout souls like Miss Barbara Gifford, of A. D. Sedgwick's *Shadow of Life*, they appealed strongly. "I hope you care for Tolstoi, Gavan," she said to her nephew, "not the novels, they are very, very sad and so long and the characters have such a number of names it is most confusing, but the dear little books on religion. It is all there—love of all men and non-resistance of evil, and self-renunciation."

Resurrection was written in 1899 and the English translation, by Mrs. Aylmer Maude, appeared in 1900. By this time Tolstoi's circle of readers had widened considerably; and a widened circle meant among other things an increase in hasty and unenlightened criticism. Many voices were raised in denunciation of this new book. There had been disapproving comments on Tolstoi's treatment of sexual matters before, but now something like an outcry arose. The details of the lives of criminals and prostitutes, said disgusted readers, could have none but painful and degrading effects on the minds of those who read about them and especially on the minds of the young. The intention of the book—to show

how a debased and unhappy man could rise again to a higher life—might, as was claimed, be in itself excellent but the means by which it was carried out made the book unfit for those who would keep their minds untainted. Mr. Aylmer Maude, in his preface to the revised edition of *Resurrection*, said:—

The Society of Friends (i.e. the Quakers) have generously helped the settlement in Canada of the Doukhobórs, that sect of non-resisters whose exodus from Russia Tolstoy assisted by the sale of the Russian original of *Resurrection*. In November 1900 the Friends' Doukhobór Committee accepted from the proceeds of my wife's translation a sum of £150. A year later—some of them having, meanwhile, read the first seventeen chapters of the book—they resolved to refund this money on the ground that the work contains passages likely to pollute the minds of its readers. One member of the committee mentioned finding the book in his house and burning it! Another wrote to remonstrate with Tolstoy on the sin he had committed in writing it. Others, who had not read any part of the book, hearing its nature described at the meeting called to consider the matter, agreed that it would be a stain on the Society of Friends to use money coming from the sale of such a work.

Yet while the stricter moralists rejected it there was a large public ready to receive *Resurrection*, although most people agreed that it did not make pleasant reading. "I feel as you do about *Resurrection*," wrote Anne Douglas Sedgwick to her friend, Mrs. Pitman, "it holds but it doesn't charm one." There were some, however, who could overlook the unpleasantness and admire the book whole-heartedly for its high and humane teaching. Miss Lena Ashwell calls it "Tolstoi's magnificent novel." "The strongest influences in literature at that time," she says, "were Tolstoi and Maeterlinck, and both impressed me profoundly. Whatever the degradation of the life, the emphasis was placed upon the imperishable beauty and indestructibility of the human soul." There were many also who read it because it was much talked about and because it was the fashion. "Every creature you meet is reading Tolstoi's *Resurrection*," wrote Mme Duclaux (who had been Miss Mary Clarke) to Lady Dorothy Nevill, "which is really a wonderful book for the life and thought in it, although rather mad."

"Rather mad" was the verdict of a good many people on Tolstoi himself as well as on his books at this time, while stories and gossip

concerning him were coming over from Russia. English people learnt how he had given up meat and tobacco, had denounced field sports as equivalents for cruelty and lust of blood, and had hidden his gun away to rot and rust; how he dug and ploughed and reaped and had learnt to make boots; how he quarrelled with his family and was denounced by the Government. Philanthropy was all very well, said the matter-of-fact people, but this was carrying things too far; this was beyond benevolence, beyond even eccentricity. Tolstoi's ardent disciples replied that if he were mad it was the divine madness of genius, such as had inspired great teachers and prophets since the world began.

This loud publicity helped to increase the demand for his books. "Hardly a day would pass," says Mr. Stevens, "without somebody wanting to buy or borrow one or more of his works. *War and Peace*, *The Kreutzer Sonata*, *Anna Karenina* and *Resurrection* must have been among the best-sellers for a decade or more." Tolstoi affected English thought to a degree that cannot be measured. No writer on social, religious or philosophical subjects could afford to disregard him. The young advanced thinkers studied him with earnestness and enthusiasm. "He introduced us," says Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, "to a philosophy of life sweeter, richer and more compassionately objective than any of us had imagined. He took us far out of the complacent insularity of British ideals." His doctrines were held with fervour and attacked with fury; and when he died in November 1910 he was held in remembrance by many almost as a saint and a martyr. "The spirit of Tolstoy—the spirit I most revere among the dead," said Lawrence Irving.

A third Russian writer whose works were widely read during the 'eighties and 'nineties was Fyodor Dostoevsky. He never became notably popular, though for a time some critics—including Mr. Maurice Baring—were inclined to place him even higher than Turgeniev or Tolstoi. His life had been one of terrible suffering and hardship. He had been sentenced to death for a political offence, reprieved at the last moment and sent to Siberia where he had remained as a prisoner for four years, and he had afterwards spent six years in exile. He was epileptic, miserably poor, and distracted by family troubles. All this made his work so full of darkness and misery as to be almost terrifying. He dwelt on the abnormal and the despairing, and though he had a strong

religious faith, which is evident in all his books, that only seemed to serve in making blacker his picture of the state of man which had resulted from a denial of God. Conrad called him a "grimacing, haunted creature." Robert Louis Stevenson said that to read Dostoievsky's *Le Crime et le Chatiment* was like having an illness, though it was easily the greatest book he had read for ten years. Anne Douglas Sedgwick, reading this criticism in Stevenson's *Letters*, was caught by the phrase; it *was* like having an illness, she agreed. "I began it some years ago, but couldn't go on," she said; "one of the few books I have had to give up because it literally *was too good*. . . . My head reeled over the horror of it." Henry James also found himself unable to finish *Crime and Punishment*, but that was because he found it dull; there were many people who did, said Stevenson. John Addington Symonds admired it. John Freeman said that when you read Dostoievsky "even for the hundredth time you feel that you have never read a novel before and that there are no novels but his."

Of all Dostoievsky's works, *The Brothers Kamarazov* was probably the one best known in England. Mr. Frank Swinnerton says that it would be hard to exaggerate the impression made upon young readers by the appearance of Mrs. Garnett's translation in 1912. It was no less painful and terrible than the rest of Dostoievsky's stories, but it showed perhaps more plainly than any of the others the passion of love and pity with which the author yearned over the sinful and the unhappy. "The hero is a kind of Christian saint," said John Bailey, "with that amazing love of sinners which is the only thing that heals them and reveals Christ." "Dostoievsky is capable of living other men's lives as they live them," declared John Freeman. Something of the book's teaching may be gathered from the words put into the mouth of Father Zosima, one of the characters:—

Be no man's judge, humble love is a terrible power which effects more than violence. Only active love can bring out faith. Love men and do not be afraid of their sins; love man in his sin; love all the creatures of God and pray God to make you cheerful. Be cheerful as children and as the birds.

It was a wonderful book, said John Freeman after reading it three times. John Bailey called it the greatest book he had ever

read, "and one of the most searching and disquieting as well as winning and beautiful."

Galsworthy was led to read Dostoievsky's works through Maurice Baring's book, *Landmarks in Russian Literature*, published in 1910. Mr. Baring was an enthusiastic admirer of the great Russian writers, and his book did much to spread the knowledge of them in England. Galsworthy's admiration of Dostoievsky was tempered with criticism. After reading it the second time, just after he had read *War and Peace*, he wrote:—

I'm bound to say it doesn't wash. Amazing in places, of course, but my God! what incoherence and what verbiage and what starting of monsters out of holes to make you shudder. . . . Tolstoy is far greater and Turgeniev too.

Yet he agreed that Tolstoi and Dostoievsky reached places which Turgeniev did not even attempt. Mr. Baring placed Dostoievsky far above Turgeniev. Edward Garnett, who had from the beginning been a devoted admirer of Turgeniev, upheld always his claim to the highest place. "The subdued beauty of Turgeniev is worth more to him than all the glorious but occasionally shoddy thrillingness of Dostoievsky," says Mr. Swinnerton. Conrad thought that Turgeniev's works suffered from the multitude of his gifts. "Every gift has been heaped on his cradle. . . . There's enough there to ruin any writer."

There were other Russian writers whose works were coming to England during this period, but none that had anything like the popularity of these three; and in Russia itself the Golden Age was over.

If we remember that while most of these works were being produced in Russia the great Victorian novelists were reigning supreme in England we shall realize something of the difference, in outlook and mode of thought, between the two countries. If we remember that at the time the Russian novels were becoming known among us no great popular writer was serving the English public and that eager readers were subsisting on very thin contemporary fare we shall understand something of the force and freshness of their appeal. The first impression was one of shock, and this deterred many readers from going further. Those who went courageously on found that they must submit to a compulsion strong and strange and often bitter. They were compelled to new

ways of thought and to the recognition of new standards and ideals. If they suffered in the process they also benefited largely. They gained a larger freedom of mind and spirit, along with a deeper consciousness of the brotherhood of man.

In respect of the charge often brought against these Russian novels that they tend to immorality, Matthew Arnold's words, written in 1888 of *Anna Karenina*, may be quoted:—

We have been in a world which misconducts itself nearly as much as the world of a French novel all palpitating with "modernity." But there are two things in which the Russian novel—Count Tolstoy's novel at any rate—is very advantageously distinguished from the type of novel now so much in request in France. In the first place there is no fine sentiment, at once tiresome and false. We are not told to believe, for example, that Anna is wonderfully exalted and ennobled by her passion for Vronsky. The English reader is thus saved from many a groan of impatience. The other thing is yet more important. Our Russian novelist deals abundantly with criminal passion and with adultery, but he does not seem to feel himself owing any service to the goddess Lubricity or bound to put in touches at this goddess's dictation. Much . . . is painful, much is unpleasant, but nothing is of a nature to trouble the senses or to please those who wish their senses troubled. This taint is wholly absent.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EMPIRE

ON April 15, 1719, occurred an event which proved to be of major importance in the history of English literature and in the history of England—Daniel Defoe published his *Robinson Crusoe*. From that time onwards up to at least the middle of the nineteenth century Defoe's epic of the pioneer was, next to the Bible and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the book most widely read by English people; and although after that time its popularity began to decline it is still one of those books of which every Englishman knows something. George Borrow, writing in 1848, declared that *Robinson Crusoe* had exerted over the minds of Englishmen “an influence certainly greater than any other of modern times,” and that to it “from the hardy deeds which it narrates, and the spirit of strange and romantic enterprise which it tends to awaken, England owes many of her astonishing discoveries by sea and land and no inconsiderable part of her naval glory.” It is true that as time went on *Robinson Crusoe* came to be looked upon as the special property of the younger folk, but that took away nothing from its influence. The boys and girls read it and delighted in it; and as they grew up did not leave it behind as they left many of their childish books for they found that the idea of going out and making a way for one's self in a strange country, with toil and hardship and the use of every inventive faculty that one possessed, remained as fascinating as ever. The Englishman is, we like to think, exceptionally gifted as a colonist, and some of his aptitude he surely owes to the delight with which he has followed Crusoe through the dangers and shifts and astonishing ingenuities of his sojourn on the desert island; while Man Friday has familiarized him with the idea of a native population.

During the hundred and seventy years that followed the appearance of *Robinson Crusoe* the appetite to which it so generously ministered was but sparsely fed from other sources. There came many excellent boys' stories of adventure and many tales of the beauties and wonders of far-off lands, but no great imaginative writer took for his theme the life of Englishmen in a strange new country and treated it with that mixture of romance and realism

which, as Robert Louis Stevenson has said, makes *Robinson Crusoe* a work of the highest art. Yet all this time Englishmen were at work in distant lands, clearing swamps and forests, digging, ploughing, planting, laying down roads and building bridges, making for themselves homes where once had been a wilderness and gathering those homesteads into towns and provinces; opening up great trade routes; bringing English methods and English laws to savage and backward peoples—sometimes it must be owned with injustice and cruelty, but oftener with beneficence and wisdom. All this the people at home knew in a formal way through newspapers and proclamations and travellers' reports, but their imagination remained almost untouched and few realized how wonderful was the work of Empire building that was going on.

By the time the 'eighties came this lack of pioneer literature was being keenly though not always consciously felt. The Victorian age had, so far, been mainly concerned with questions relating to internal and domestic affairs and with problems of science, and its literature had followed closely on the same path. Now there began to creep in that feeling of staleness and confinement which was to bring about the revolt of the 'nineties. Men longed for a way of escape from their everyday life, and though some found it in mysticism, some in religious excitement and some in the sensuous joys of decadence the majority remained unsatisfied. What they wanted was not purely fantastic or imaginative experiences nor even adventure in its widest sense; but adventure connecting itself with their own lives—an extension of their borders into a realm of romance, yet a realm inhabited by men like themselves, doing work such as they might have done under like conditions.

They got something of what they wanted in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, published in 1884. It had not that perfect mixture of romance and realism that its author had recognized in *Robinson Crusoe*, but both those elements were present and active. "It is the fashion I believe now with the Clever Solemn Ones," wrote Mr. Hugh Walpole in 1922, "to despise Stevenson as a writer of romantic Tushery. All the same if it's realism they want I'm still waiting to see something more realistic than Pew and Long John Silver. Realism may depend as truly on a blind man's tap with his stick upon the ground as in any number of adulteries." *Treasure Island* was primarily a book for boys. Hugh

Walpole read it somewhere about 1897 when he was thirteen or fourteen; Maurice Baring read it in 1889 when he was fifteen and pronounced it "a perfect book." But its most enthusiastic readers, at least in the early days, were men, and included Mr. Gladstone, Lord Rosebery, A. J. Balfour, Randolph Churchill, James Payn, Andrew Lang, Professor Stuart and Lord Birkenhead.

Following *Treasure Island* there came in the next year another book of the same class—*King Solomon's Mines* by Rider Haggard. Here the romance distinctly predominated over the realism, yet the three Englishmen-heroes were sufficiently sympathetic characters to prevent the book being regarded as entirely unreal. This, too, was a story for boys, and hundreds of boys read it with delight. Winston Churchill, at thirteen, was one of these, but liked its sequel, *Allan Quatermain*, which came in 1887, even better, and wrote to tell the author so. James Agate has told how, having been promised *King Solomon's Mines* as a birthday present, he went up to Bakewell Station every day during the three weeks that intervened between the promise and the birthday to see if the copy displayed there was still on sale. Haggard's two books invaded the schools and established themselves firmly there. Maurice Baring read them both in 1889, while he was at Eton, and noted them in his list of books read, the first as "Excellent," the second as "Exciting." Evelyn Wrench at his preparatory school in 1893 listened to *King Solomon's Mines* as retailed by one of his school-fellows in the dormitory at night, and wrote home to tell his parents that one of the boys had put a towel round himself and danced all over the dormitory pretending to be Gagoul the Witch. They entered the girls' schools too; Rider Haggard tells of a letter he received from one of these establishments congratulating him "with great earnestness in having produced in *King Solomon's Mines* a thrilling book without a heroine." Of grown-up readers there were also many. "We all loved *King Solomon's Mines*" says Max Pemberton, "and, as a reviewer said, the author made children of us." Andrew Lang said he almost preferred it to *Treasure Island*, and Mr. Gladstone read it with great enjoyment.

It was probably this adult appreciation that led Mr. Haggard to think less exclusively in his succeeding books of his young readers, and to introduce a love interest; which doubtless lost him the favour of those distinctly un-Victorian schoolgirls who had

rejoiced in the absence of sentiment in *King Solomon's Mines*. In these later stories the realistic element shrank, until they became pure romance, and it was as romance that they were received by the public. Edmund Gosse declared that he had never been thrilled or terrified by any book as he had been by certain pages of *She*. "It is simply unsurpassable." R. L. Stevenson pronounced *Nada the Lily* to be A1; the Prince of Wales and his family gave the palm to *Eric Brighteyes*. Maurice Baring says that when he went to breakfast with his Eton tutor they used to discuss Haggard and Stevenson; Mr. Impey greatly preferred Haggard, and told how he had sat up very late one night reading *She*.

Yet as the stories went on many people felt a little disappointment. They had hoped for better things from the author of *King Solomon's Mines*. Mr. Haggard was giving them thrills in plenty, and carrying them into realms strange and marvellous. Yet this, delightful as it was, did not meet all their needs. He seemed to have lost touch with life, and when they left his exciting company it was with aspirations unquickened and vision only vaguely extended. It was probably the consciousness of this that made Henry Sidgwick say, "I am grieved to find during the last year or two that novels which the public enthuse about are not good for me. The great instance is Rider Haggard. I read *She* but under protest, and with a firm resolve not to read any more."

It was clear that Rider Haggard was not the man who was to give England the books for which she was waiting; the man who was to do so had, in fact, already appeared though he was not yet fully recognized. In the late 'eighties there had begun to arrive in England from India a series of little books in grey paper covers, published as the Railway Library and written by a young man twenty-three years old whose name was Rudyard Kipling. Justin McCarthy tells how, by chance, he took up one of these books and "lighted on a chapter of a story by an author whose name I had never heard before." He read on and soon became fascinated. "Here at last was the man I had been long expecting, here was the life of the Englishman in India revealed by the touch of the new enchanter's wand." He was delighted by his discovery and went about among his friends telling them of it. He found that some had heard of Rudyard Kipling, but many had not; all who had read any of the stories in the little books agreed that here was something new and intensely interesting to Englishmen. Max

Pemberton was introduced to the stories by a man who came into the office of his paper, *Vanity Fair*, and

produced one of the little paper books containing *Soldiers Three*. He raved about it, though none of us had heard of the name of Kipling. Later we discovered that many people were fascinated by these clever stories and that Cabinet Ministers were reading them.

Sidney Low came across some of these books towards the end of 1889, and at once his interest and curiosity were aroused. "I spent an afternoon reading *Soldiers Three*," he says, "and when I went out to a dinner party that evening I could talk of nothing but this marvellous writer who had dawned upon the Eastern horizon."

Edward Burne-Jones, who was Rudyard Kipling's uncle, was among the first to read these books, and wrote to his nephew telling of the delight and pride he had felt in them, and how they had given him a new pleasure in life. Conan Doyle, who was at this time a young and struggling doctor, and only just beginning his career as a successful author, says, "I well remember how eagerly I bought his first book, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, when buying a book was a rare strain upon my exchequer." Frederick Anstey was another early and admiring reader, and Stevenson declared Kipling "too clever to live."

Kipling came to England in the late autumn of 1889, and one morning in February 1890 there arrived at the office of the *National Observer* (a literary review lately started in London) a packet of manuscript addressed in an unfamiliar hand. The editor, W. E. Henley, opened it and found that it contained a selection of poems called *Barrack Room Ballads*, by Rudyard Kipling. Henley began to read one of these, *Danny Deever*, and soon was seen, to the delight of his staff—but not to their astonishment, for they were used to such demonstrations—flinging himself about and shouting for joy. The ballads were so exactly after his own heart. They were the work of a poet, and Henley, who was a poet himself, was always ready with a triumphant paean to greet a brother. They told of England's Empire overseas, the Empire that Henley loved, and whose glories he celebrated with an enthusiasm that seemed to the lukewarm among the readers of his paper extravagant and ridiculous. They were outspoken almost to coarseness, and

Henley, who hated nothing—unless it might be Mr. Gladstone—so much as a mincing propriety of phrase, exulted in their audacious flouting of conventions. Kipling was at once enrolled in the band of Henley's "young men," the remarkable company of writers that was, under his inspiration, making the *National Observer*, though its circulation was small, the most notable literary organ of the day.

It must be remembered that this was the year of the publication of *Dorian Gray*, when the Decadents were making their attempt to capture the reading public with their clever, sensuous, alluring art. The *National Observer* stood for all that they ignored or despised. One thing only had Henley in common with the Decadents, he was as staunch an individualist as any among them, but his individualism led not to self-indulgence but to a strong, almost fierce upholding of the principle that a man should be master of his fate and captain of his soul. His paper set up a high ideal, and called for energy, resolution and courage in the effort to attain it; and although it made no great appeal to the general public it had a small band of readers as loyal and enthusiastic as any editor could desire. "We were relatively poor, my friend and I," writes Wilfrid Whitten, then a young journalist, afterwards editor of various literary periodicals, "and we clubbed our money week after week to buy the paper. How we shouted and wrote each other notes about Mrs. Meynell's *Rejection*, Kenneth Grahame's *Orion*, Kipling's *Tomlinson*, and the trail of Henley over all."

The whole staff exulted with Henley over his new recruit and from February to July 1890, when a fresh *Ballad* was appearing with each issue of the paper, they encouraged one another in the belief that the days of wider popularity were at hand. For Kipling's verses, with their audacity and their captivating lilt, caught the ear of many beyond the small circle of the *Observer*'s regular subscribers. They were quoted and praised until they became common talk. Long before the *Ballads* were published in collected form in 1892, dozens of young people knew most of them by heart and recited them to one another in delighted appreciation both of their music and of their sentiment. "The cadences of Kipling's *Barrack Room Ballads* sent city readers singing and chanting back from their offices," wrote Mrs. Meynell's son, Everard, "towards suburban sunset and supper."

Kipling's poetry, however, did not please everybody. It was too unlike the popular verse of the day for that. Some of the critics called it flashy and loud-mouthed and warned their readers not to be taken in by a brazen jingle that meant little or nothing. Oscar Wilde said that it "revealed life by superb flashes of vulgarity." John Middleton Murry tells us that his father abominated Kipling, though he had never read any of his works. Henry James considered him "shockingly precocious." His prose stories, too, were to some a little startling by reason of their realistic presentment of things strange to their readers. Mrs. Wilfrid Ward wrote to her husband in April 1890, "Kind old Craik has just sent me a story of Kipling's, the new author. It certainly is very striking—a little coarse."

One of the most famous of Kipling's stories, *The Light that Failed*, was published in March 1891, and so great was the rush for it that in April Henry Sidgwick was still trying in vain to get it from his bookseller. When at length a copy did arrive he read it eagerly. "I quite recognize its force," he said, ". . . but I feel that the handling of the subject is jerky and violent, and, what is worse, there do not seem to me to be any characters in it except the hero and perhaps Bessie." Stevenson was alarmed by Kipling's copiousness and haste; at the rate he was going on his works would soon fill the habitable globe. "Kipling," said Stevenson, "is by far the most promising young man who has appeared since —ahem—I appeared. . . . Surely he was armed for better conflicts than these succinct sketches and flying leaves of verse."

But whatever his faults, Kipling was undoubtedly making his mark on English readers. As one story after another came with its message from overseas, as one ballad after another sang itself into the public consciousness and men went about their work to the rhythms of *Mandalay* and *Gunga Din*, an interest in their kinsfolk who were living and toiling in the far-off lands that England had won for her own began to awake in those who had never before thought much about the Empire or what it stood for. H. G. Wells, in his *New Machiavelli*, speaks of Kipling's "lyric delight in the sounds and colours, in the very odours of empire," and something of this delight came through to even the most critical among his readers.

This awakening of Imperialism while it ministered to, at the same time quickened the longing for realistic adventure outside

the bounds of our own little island, and readers turned eagerly to other authors beside Kipling who, while they set them down in strange places, could make them feel the stirring of the blood that comes with sympathy and understanding. They had not forgotten *Treasure Island* and they had followed its author in his wanderings among the islands of the Pacific and his settlement in Samoa. The accounts that came to England telling how he was making for himself a home in that far-away land were almost as good as a new *Robinson Crusoe* and made men eager to read his stories which breathed the same spirit of gallant adventure.

Stevenson, in a moment of depression not long before his death in 1894, wrote that he was read only by "journalists, by my fellow-novelists and by boys." Even so his public was of no small account for the journalists reached up to such men as Andrew Lang and Edmund Gosse, the author-admirers included John Galsworthy, Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard and Arnold Bennett, while the boy readers were to be found in their thousands all over England; and of this vast youthful company it is only necessary to name a few—Maurice Baring, John Middleton Murry, Hugh Walpole—to realize that Stevenson's name would be kept in remembrance for many years to come. But in fact Stevenson's public extended far beyond the limits that his pessimism set to it. Sir George Trevelyan was his early and staunch admirer, Stopford Brooke thought him a fine story-teller, and Canon Barnett read his essays with delight. Burne-Jones read each of his books as they came out and loved them. *Catriona* he received with a shout of praise. "It is a wonder and every page glitters and I can't make out why the Speaker doesn't read it to the House of an evening—much better for them to listen to than to each other's nonsense. . . . Oh, he's a miracle of a lad, that boy out there in the Cannibal Islands."

"One took Stevenson seriously, almost as a religion," says Mr Alfred Stevens, whose position at Mudie's and afterwards at Heinemann's enabled him to judge with some accuracy what the public was reading, "and felt it a duty as well as a pleasure to read all his writings if opportunity permitted. When giving books as presents his was one of the first names that would spring to the mind." This may perhaps seem to carry a suggestion that the books were dull and read only because the author had managed to reach such a position that it was "the proper thing" to know

all about his works. This was not so. He was taken as a religion because of the high and gallant spirit that filled his stories, the spirit that was teaching England to take her glories and responsibilities nobly with no "craven fear of being great." His gospel was the gospel of Kipling, and for the most part those who read the books of the one read also the books of the other. "Military enthusiasm," says Henry Nevinson, looking back to his youth in the 'nineties, "was rising higher and higher, inspired partly by the writings of Kipling, Stevenson and Henley, but chiefly by ignorance of war." Yet none of these three were war-mongers. They glorified the fighting man, but it was as the keeper of the Empire, not as the aggressor. Kipling, says H. G. Wells, "gave wild shouts of boyish enthusiasm for effective force"; but it was Kipling, too, who said, "By the peace among our peoples let men know we serve the Lord."

In 1894 came a book by a new author, Anthony Hope, opening up to home-abiding Englishmen yet another way of escape from a too cramping insularity. This time it was not to some distant part of the Empire they were invited, or to an isle of beauty set in southern seas. It was to a country lying within the borders of Europe, but unknown to geographers and map-makers, "the delectable country of Ruritania," for the discovery of which, as Dion Clayton Calthrop has said, Anthony Hope ought long to be remembered and thanked. Thither went gaily young red-haired Rudolf Rassendyll, half England following at his heels; and found there scope for all that he possessed of courage, resource and chivalry, in a strange and perilous adventure. He was not called upon to slay dragons or to perform marvellous feats of arms, but to take the chief part in a State emergency—not so far removed from known State emergencies as to appear wholly fantastic—and in the moment of triumph to forgo the hero's natural reward, for love of country and of his lady. There were few young men in England who read *The Prisoner of Zenda* who did not yearn towards Ruritania, and feel that in that enchanting land they too would have played their parts in high heroic fashion; so finely did reality blend itself with romance. "I think," said Anthony Hope, "that the two variants that struck the popular fancy in my little book were royalty and red hair" (again romance and reality); "the former is always a safe card to play, and its combination with the latter had a touch of novelty." Sir Walter Besant said that the

book charmed because it was "gay, light-hearted, adventurous . . . like Dumas himself," and Stevenson, in a letter found on his writing-table after his death, congratulated the author on his "very spirited and gallant little book." Boys and girls loved it. Sir Oliver Lodge read it aloud to his family and was forced to continue until long after their usual bed-time, since the young people could not bear to leave the hero in the midst of his exciting adventure. Some of its popularity the book certainly owed to those general causes which had created a longing for wider experiences. "There will be a renaissance of Ruritania whenever the world of reality is being rather more unheroic than usual," says Miss G. B. Stern.

The Prisoner of Zenda was published in April, and in June the seventh thousand was being advertised. Its sequel, *Rupert of Hentzau*, came in 1898. Everyone in England seemed to have read both these books, except Mr. Gladstone. Anthony Hope says that at a lunch at the house of Bishop Wilberforce, the Duke of Teck talked to him for a long time about the *Prisoner* and its sequel, and afterwards attempted to introduce him to Mr. Gladstone. "Anthony Hope—Never heard of him; *Prisoner of Zenda*—Never heard of it," was the rather astonishing reply of the old, novel-reading statesman. Lord Russell of Killowen claimed to have read the book, though he was a little mixed as to its authorship. "After expressing his approval of Stanley Weyman's *Prisoner of Zenda* he kindly complimented me on *A Gentleman of France*," says Anthony Hope. Stanley Weyman was another popular novelist of the day who wrote historical novels of adventure. His books were often classed with those of Anthony Hope, and the works of both sold in enormous numbers. "All looked forward to and enjoyed a new historical novel by Stanley Weyman," says Mr. Alfred Stevens. Both Hope and Weyman had a place among W. S. Gilbert's favourite authors. "In fiction I must say I do like what I call healthy work," he declared. George Augusta Sala was delighted with Weyman's *The Red Cockade*, and both Sidney Low and Stevenson praised *A Gentleman of France*. "A real chivalrous yarn, like the Dumas and yet unlike," said Stevenson.

But not Hope nor Weyman nor Henley nor even Stevenson himself could move the English nation as Kipling moved it. "Kipling's star was high in the heavens," said Mrs. Atherton, speaking of the 'nineties, and those of us who lived through those years can remember how brightly it shone. From biographies and

autobiographies and novels of the time emerges a procession of men and women bringing their tribute to the poet of Imperialism. "I discovered Kipling," says Herbert Palmer, and he was one of a great youthful company all making the same discovery, and entering thereby into new realms of aspiration and endeavour. Edgar Wallace, then a young man in South Africa, says that he soaked himself in Kipling; Maurice Baring tells how he and his friend, Hubert Cornish, were "spellbound" by him. Dick Remington, the hero of H. G. Wells's *New Machiavelli*, went up to Cambridge in 1895, and found that the prevailing force there was Kiplingism. "We were all . . . very distinctly Imperialists also, and professed a vivid sense of the White Man's Burden." "What did Kipling give me exactly?" Remington asked himself.

He helped to broaden my geographical sense immensely, and he provided phrases for just that desire for discipline and devotion and organized effort the Socialism of our time failed to express, that the current socialistic movement still fails, I think, to express.

Such stanzas as that beginning, "Keep ye the law, be swift in all obedience,"

tore something out of my inmost nature and gave it a shape and I took it back from him shaped, and let much of the rest of him, the tumult and the bullying, the hysteria and the impatience, the incoherence and inconsistency, go uncriticized for the sake of it.

The poem beginning "The 'eathen in 'is blindness," contained, Remington thought, the quintessential wisdom. It really was "All along o' dirtiness, All along o' mess, All along o' doin' things rather more-or-less" that most of our social evils came.

Nor was it only youthful enthusiasts who heard Kipling gladly. His appeal was to readers of all ages and temperaments and classes. Eager, headstrong Edith Nesbit, devoted to "causes" and working hard for a living, was one of his disciples, and fastidious, leisured Frederick Anstey was another. Conan Doyle loved Kipling:—

Barrack Room Ballads, *Bolivar*, *East and West*, and above all, the badly named *Envoi* became part of my very self. I always read the last one aloud to my little circle before we start on any fresh expedition, because it contains the very essence of travel, romance, and high adventure.

Cultured, scholarly Mrs. Humphry Ward had her favourite poem, *To the True Romance*. "The debt that two generations owe

to Mr. Kipling is, I think, past calculating," she said. Sir Charles Dilke, tending towards agnosticism, included Kipling's works in his collection of favourite books, and Henry Scott Holland, devoted High Churchman, included them in his. "I think Kipling reaches the things which can hardly be put into words, but which, as the mystics teach us, nourish the soul," said Robertson Nicoll. Lewis Carroll, mathematician and Oxford don, was Kipling's fervent admirer, and Oscar Wilde was sometimes enthusiastic about him. Joseph Conrad placed him, in 1898, as first among "the people in literature who deserve attention," and Leslie Stephen, writing to his American friend, Mr. Norton, on the subject of modern novelists, said, "Your friend, Rudyard Kipling, seems to be the best of the lot. He has both popularity and genius." Mrs. T. P. O'Connor found relief during a tedious illness in reading *Kim*. "Oh, that great white road!" she says. Mary Gladstone pronounced the *Jungle Book* "splendid." Lord Esher thought that "anyone who can read that chapter in *Stalky* about the old boys' match without a lump in his throat must be made of iron."

So the great procession of admirers goes on, prolonging itself indefinitely. Even more convincing as a testimony is the record of those anxious days in 1896 when Kipling, in a New York hotel, was fighting what seemed an almost hopeless battle against an attack of pneumonia. All over England there was the tenseness of feeling that comes only when national interests are concerned, as men waited for the telegrams that told of his progress; and when news came that the crisis was passed it was as if some national danger had been averted.

The next year was the year of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Poet Laureate celebrated it by verses published in *The Times* on the morning of the great day, July 15th. He surveyed the Queen's wide-spreading Empire, then went on:—

And panoplied alike for War or Peace,
Victoria's England furroweth still the foam,
To harvest Empire, wiser than was Greece,
Wider than Rome!

Therefore, with glowing hearts and proud, glad tears,
The children of her Island Realm to-day
Recall her sixty venerable years
Of virtuous sway.

Men read it, and felt, perhaps, their pride in the Empire quickened; then went to take their part in the Jubilee celebrations. There came the marvellous procession and the thanksgiving service in St. Paul's Cathedral. Kings and princes and those set in high places came to pay their homage to a great queen and to thank God for the glory of England. The splendours of empire were spread out, with the symbols of dominion over land and sea. Men went to their rest that night filled with pride—not ignoble pride—in the mother country and her wonderful daughters, glorying in their own dignity as members of so mighty an Empire. In the morning they came to their newspapers, eager to live over again those brilliant hours; and found there a warning, so grave, so wise, so beautifully spoken that it turned the whole current of their thoughts. The influence of Kipling's *Recessional*, coming at a time when men's minds were full of the elation of conscious power, was enormous. It sobered without depressing them. Many who were young then remember still how that solemn "Lest We Forget" fell on their ears, and how from henceforward the Empire became for them not a subject for "frantic boast and foolish word" but a trust held under the "awful hand" of the Lord God of Hosts. "It is the greatest poem that has been written by any living man," says Sir Edward Clarke in a speech made soon after it appeared. "Dear Ruddy," wrote Edward Burne-Jones to Kipling, "I love your Hymn—it is beautiful and solemn and says the word that had to be said." It became and has remained England's great Hymn of Empire.

Galsworthy held that Kipling's "real importance, even his actual position, is more due to his power over words and his vision than his imperialism." This is true in so far as it was his power over words and his vision that made him a poet, and so able to convey his message with penetrating force and beauty. But his message was imperialism, and there were few who in listening to the sound disregarded the substance. To the nation at large Kipling stood as the poet of Empire. Men and women who cared little for poetry and seldom read any turned to him with interest because of this reputation; many of them knew the *Recessional* by heart. When, in 1900, the South African War broke out, the nation waited expectantly for Kipling to speak to them as he had spoken at the Jubilee. What they got was *The Absent-Minded Beggar*. It was a catchy jingle, sincere and sympathetic, and full of imperialis-

tic feeling. It did what it set out to do—reminded men of the soldiers' dependants and brought in money to help them. Lady Tree says that "she had the judgment to see that it was one of the greatest human appeals ever made." She sang it at many concerts and meetings, and gathered in large sums of money for the fund. It was sung all over the country; there could scarcely have been anyone who did not know at least its refrain. But it did not touch the deeper feeling of the nation as the *Recessional* had touched it. Kipling's admirers did their best to justify this latest effort, and a few tried to make themselves believe that it was poetry; but remembering that July morning three years before when the solemn music of the *Recessional* first sounded in their ears, gave up the attempt. Here was imperialism, but without the word magic or the vision. The occasion passed, and *The Absent-Minded Beggar* was forgotten.

Some people date the decline of Kipling's vogue from the publication of this poem, others put it further back. What is clear is that the opening of the new century saw the decline established beyond question. He had not been displaced by a rival, for no other poet had risen to pre-eminence. Critics pointed to a marked deterioration in his work. The new fashions of the new reign made him seem a little out of date. "For a year or so we have heard comparatively little of Mr. Kipling," wrote T. W. H. Crosland in 1901. "There was a tendency to look on Mr. Kipling as one who had been. You need not speak of him with respect, and you could say at dinner that you had not read his latest contribution to the periodical Press without getting yourself put down as a graceless, uncultivated person." Galsworthy, writing in 1903 to Edward Garnett, whose article on Kipling had just appeared in the *Speaker*, said, "You might, I think, have dwelt a little more on the artistic side of him in the earlier part of the review, seeing that you trace his progress to his present perdition."

This was written soon after Kipling had aroused the ire of many readers—even of some who had been among his warmest admirers—by his poem, *The Islanders*. It was a scathing attack upon the British nation for its supineness, absorption in trivialities and neglect of higher duties.

Then ye contented your souls
With the flannelled fools at the wickets and the muddied oafs at the goals,
sang Kipling, and resentful young men protested hotly and older ones regretted that such un-English sentiments should come from

the poet they had always looked upon as the embodiment of patriotism and national pride. The poem probably did some good, but it left the country irritated, not moved.

There were many, however, who saw in all these things only a temporary eclipse. They recognized that Kipling's place as the poet of Empire was ultimately secure. On February 27, 1903, there was published in *The Times* a poem by Kipling, called *South Africa*, and Lord Esher wrote to his son, the Hon. Maurice Brett:—

I wonder what you think of Kipling's poem in to-day's *Times*, I think some of it is rather rough. He apparently intends to make South Africa his second literary field of conquest—after India. The Italians have placed an inscription on Elizabeth Browning's house in Florence, "Here lived Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose poems are a golden thread binding Italy to England." Some such inscription will have been earned by Kipling in India; and if he could do the same for South Africa he would deserve a place in Westminster Abbey.

CHAPTER IX

THE FEMINISTS

THE last decade of Queen Victoria's reign saw the Women's Movement entering upon a fresh stage. The New Woman was new no longer. She had been more or less accepted by the community and the first violent interest in her movements had died down. She was going on her way, working hard and steadily, and justifying the claims that she had made. By courage and perseverance she was breaking down one after another the barriers that had shut her out from opportunities of service and responsibility; but the law which denied her the Parliamentary vote was still in force, and it was for the alteration of this that she was now specially working, with unfaltering spirit and energy.

Her example and her success had inspired hundreds of her sisters and the Women's Movement was extending itself in many directions. As an inevitable consequence of this, new ideas and new methods of advancing the cause had been introduced. Antagonism to men had definitely increased, and there was a tone of far greater bitterness among the propagandists of the 'nineties—who were beginning to be called not New Women, but Feminists—than there had been among their forerunners. This was partly because the large increase in numbers had meant that many women had been drawn in who desired excitement and understood little of the real aims of the movement; partly because better education and fuller opportunities had revealed to women more of the underside of life than they had ever known before. Josephine Butler's campaign had shocked and startled them, and aroused in them a passionate indignation against the men who sacrificed women to the satisfaction of their sexual appetites. The sex question became with some women almost an obsession. They took up their pens and poured out the rage and disgust that was in their hearts, and it is small wonder that much of what they wrote was neither artistic nor tending to edification. The movement became in some directions slightly hysterical, so much so that its adherents gained the name of the Shrieking Sisterhood. Its leaders were no longer confined to the sane, balanced women who looked not to sex war but to sex co-operation as a means of attaining their high ends; the most 'pro-

minent and the loudest-voiced were those who preached that woman was wholly divine and man the beast.

In some ways this literature retarded rather than advanced the woman's cause, for though it was often written with a high moral purpose, the general public, receiving the impression that it dealt with "unpleasant" subjects, classed it with the literature of the Decadents, so that *The Heavenly Twins* received much the same condemnation as *Esther Waters*. The girls who read these books—and many girls did read them, in spite of parental disapproval—tended to become restless and discontented. They saw themselves as martyrs, persecuted by members of an inferior sex, in the persons of their fathers, who forced them to occupy a subordinate position and denied them the freedom which was their right. The desire to escape from such tyranny led soon to overt acts, and so came in the Revolting Daughter. She was of a type entirely different from the girls who were striving to obtain wider opportunities for education and service. She had, as a rule, only vague ideas as to what she wanted to do with her life, except that she wanted to be free from control. In most cases her economic dependence on her parents prevented her from doing more than making her home unhappy by disobedience and discontent. Occasionally the impulse was strong enough to make her leave home, though she usually found, as H. G. Wells's Ann Veronica found, that an untrained girl, equipped only with vague aspirations to "do something," could make little headway in the struggle for existence, and she either married or returned home. She was the product of unwise propaganda acting on untrained intelligence, and her existence was a strong argument in favour of the Feminist plea for careers for women.

The case of the Revolting Wife attracted more attention. She, so many people said, had been first incited to rebellion by Ibsen's *Doll's House*, which was produced in England in 1889; though Dorothy Cheston Bennett has declared, "Before I saw or heard of the *Doll's House* I belonged to the Noras of this earth." Mr. Granville Barker has told of the "short-haired women (thirty years before the fashion) and long-haired men (some thirty years behind it)" who went to see the *Doll's House* and applauded enthusiastically, looking upon it not so much as a play as a piece of effective Feminist propaganda. They were a mere handful, he says, but enough to infect the whole audience. Mary Gladstone

went to one of the early performances, in June 1889. She sat next to Lord Rowton, who, she said, seemed deeply impressed. She herself thought it "a curious piece, not suited to drama, but full of interest and suggestion." She would perhaps have agreed with Thomas Hardy, who said, "Ibsen's edifying is too obvious."

It was not too obvious, however, for the thoroughgoing Feminists. Edith Nesbit was a fervent Ibsen enthusiast, Mona Caird hailed Ibsen as a champion of the woman's cause. Mrs. T. P. O'Connor said that all women owed him a debt of gratitude for writing *A Doll's House*, "that great play which is one of the most powerful pleas for the emancipation of women." Mr. Lloyd George declared that Ibsen had converted him to Woman's Suffrage, though the women might have replied that the results of his conversion were not very evident. Those who were indifferent or lukewarm in the cause regarded the propaganda element in the play as destructive of its dramatic value. "Charm has been denied to Ibsen," said Lionel Johnson, "and therefore woman does not really live in his plays."

Happy wives, entirely contented with their homes and families, disliked him, as did Mrs. Harrison, of Miss May Sinclair's *Tree of Heaven*. Violent Anti-Feminists denounced him. Miss Marie Corelli held him mainly responsible for the Revolting Wives. In *The Mighty Atom* she contrasted the primitive instincts of the ignorant housemaid, Lucy, with the modern ethics that had justified Lucy's mistress in her flight from her husband.

Poor Lucy! She had never read the works of Ibsen and was entirely ignorant of the "New Morality." Had she been taught these modern ethics, she would have recognized in Mrs. Valliscourt's conduct merely a "noble" outbreak of "white purity" and virtue. But she had "barbaric" notions of motherhood. She believed in its sacredness in quite an obstinate, prejudiced and old-fashioned way. She was nothing but "a child of nature," poor simple, Ibsen-less housemaid Lucy.

Sir Walter Besant was as convinced as Miss Corelli of the pernicious character of Ibsen's teaching. In an article called "The Doll's House—and After," which appeared in the *English Illustrated Magazine* for January 1890, he gave a dismal picture of the results of Nora's desertion of her home. He showed her husband degenerated into a miserable drunkard, her son a wastrel

and a forger, her daughter—separated from her lover by reason of her brother's crime—a despairing suicide. It was the “awful example” method in an extreme form, yet only the unregenerate laughed. Most of the readers of the *English Illustrated* sighed and shook their heads, and said that this was what we must expect if women were encouraged in these dreadful, new-fangled ideas of independence.

As for the husbands, it is to be feared that many of them agreed with Henry Arthur Jones who called Nora “the first of the tiresome hussies,” and said that the *Doll's House* should have ended with the husband helping himself to a whisky-and-soda and saying, “Thank God she's gone!”

Although Ibsen cannot be held entirely responsible for the keen public interest in the question of the rights and duties of married women, he certainly quickened it. Writers of every shade of opinion poured out their theories and their arguments. Mona Caird's articles in the *Westminster Review* on “The Morality of Marriage,” which appeared at intervals from August 1888 to February 1894, attracted an increasing amount of attention. In them Miss Caird traced the institution of marriage and its influence on family life from patriarchal times to her own day. “The greatest evils of modern society,” she said, “had their origin thousands of years ago in the dominant abuse of patriarchal life, the custom of woman-purchase. The system still persists in the present form of marriage, and is holding back the race from its best development.” She upheld this thesis with arguments, examples, and quotations from all sorts of authorities, and grew more and more bitter as each succeeding article brought her nearer to modern times. The *Daily Telegraph* took up the subject, and for many weeks letters appeared in its columns under the heading, “Is Marriage a Failure?” Matrimonial difficulties were exposed to the public gaze with a freedom that seemed to many people indecent, and the shrill voices of the accusing Feminists were answered by cries of shocked indignation by the upholders of the sacredness of marriage. Not until about twenty-seven thousand letters had been written was the subject allowed to drop.

In 1893 came Sarah Grand's novel, *The Heavenly Twins*. “Even William Heinemann, who seemed always ready to break a lance with public opinion, was a little doubtful as to the reception that might be accorded to this book,” says Mr. Alfred Stevens. He

published it, however, and then came the outcry. Mrs. Desmond Humphreys ("Rita") says that it created one of the greatest sensations of literature; it certainly caused tremendous excitement in the ranks of the Feminists and the Anti-Feminists, and the upholders of the new and the old morality. The general public read it with interest and pleasure, mainly because of the pranks of the irrepressible twins, Angela and Diavolo. These two formed the chief attraction of the story, and "the Heavenly twins" came into common use to denote any partnership in fun and mischief. Mrs. Gervase Elwes says it was the nickname given to her two sons, Simon and Richard. Readers were charmed also by the tenderness and grace (not usual with this author) of a highly sentimental and extravagant interlude called *The Tenor and the Boy*. But for the Feminists the importance of the book lay in its account of the marriages made by two of the girl characters, Edith and Evadne. Both fell in love with men whom, after marriage, they discovered to be fundamentally vicious. Edith, lovely, yielding, deeply religious, suffered incredible torments and, after producing a diseased and horribl: baby, died in misery. Evadne was stronger minded. She had brou_s, herself up on such books as *The Subjection of Women*, *Mrs. C_ree of Curtain Lectures*, *Tom Jones*, and *Roderick Random*, and deduced from these that the withholding of education from w_t *The* was the crowning sin of man. She had therefore applied herself to study, and especially to the study of physiology, and she carried Lucy's marriage with a mental equipment that enabled her decisivel cast off her husband when she discovered, as she did even be_r, starting on her honeymoon, the iniquities of his previous life. was the entreaties of her parents she was induced at length to conse_{nt} to occupy the same house with him, and for years they lived _{in} terms of courtesy and friendship, but in no sense as husband and wife. In a weak moment she promised her husband that she would take no part in the Women's Movement during his lifetime, and found too late that this meant the repression of her noblest instincts and aspirations; so she too ended in frustration and unhappiness.

The Heavenly Twins may be taken as typical, in subject and in spirit, of all Mrs. Sarah Grand's novels and those of her fellow Feminists. Most of these had little merit except as propaganda, and were quickly forgotten. One of the most notorious was Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, which showed some variation on the usual themes of the tyrannical father, the brutal husband, and

the high-minded, enlightened woman. The "woman" was Herminia, daughter of a dean, and she "did" what other women loudly *said* should be done, but stopped short at saying. She went to live with her lover, refusing, in spite of all his entreaties, the marriage tie; and endured the anger of her family and the sneers of society, unmoved in her own convictions. "I know what marriage is—from what vile slavery it has sprung; on what unseem horrors for my sister women it is reared and buttressed; by what unholy sacrifices it is sustained and made possible," she replied to all arguments. They had a hard struggle, for her lover's baronet father had cast off his son in anger. When her lover died and left Herminia in poverty, she struggled on, and brought up the daughter who had been born to them in her own faith. But her daughter, grown up, repudiated that faith with shame and disgust, and when she learnt that she was illegitimate and the granddaughter of a dean and a baronet, reproached her mother bitterly for having spoilt her prospects in life. Later she accepted an offer from the dean to adopt

on condition that she renounced her mother. Then Herminia ~~att~~^{ed} her own dramatic exit. She dressed herself in spotless white, ~~hid~~^{lay} down in statuesque calm upon her bed, and took a dose of poison; and there her recreant daughter found her, stiff and cold.

The book was loudly reviled, and shocked parents did their best to keep it out of the hands of the younger generation. Mr. Gladstone called it "an honest book," and the author declared that he had written it under the stress of a conviction too strong to be resisted. But it had little merit as a story and was soon forgotten. "With regard to Grant Allen's *Woman Who Did*," wrote Joseph Conrad at the end of 1898, "*c'est un livre mort*. *The Woman Who Did* had a kind of success, of curiosity mostly, and that only amongst the Philistines—the sort of people who read Marie Corelli and Hall Caine."

The leading spirit among the Anti-Feminist writers was Mrs. Lynn Linton. She had been herself, as far back as the early part of Queen Victoria's reign, a revolting daughter, but she had been disgusted by what she considered the excesses of the advocates of Women's Rights, and had gone into violent opposition, denouncing their manners, their appearance, their views on marriage, and, above all, their efforts to obtain the vote. She was now a severe, implacable old lady of over seventy, writing novels and articles against the "wild women," as she called her opponents with the

same gusto with which she had written *Christopher Kirkland* and the *Girl of the Period* articles in the 'sixties. She was a clever woman—Sir Charles Dilke thought her the cleverest woman he had known—and she was still an opponent whost thrusts were to be respected. She wrote what Mona Caird called "three ruthless articles" in the *Nineteenth Century* replying to "The Morality of Marriage." "The cradle lies across the door of the polling booth and bars the way to the Senate," she declared, and the sentiment was widely and warmly applauded. Mona Caird retorted by an article which she called "A Defence of the 'Wild' Women." Mrs. Linton, she said, divided all women roughly into two classes—"the good, beautiful, submissive, charming, noble and wise," and the "bad, ugly, rebellious, ungenerous, foolish and liberty-demanding." She took certain of Mrs. Linton's statements, "The clamour for political rights is woman's confession of sexual enmity," "Political women have always been disastrous," "All women are not always lovely and the wild women never are," and dealt with them, by argument and ridicule, in a fashion that seemed to her supporters entirely conclusive, and they in turn raised a cry of triumph.

Another equally convinced but less violent opponent of the Woman's Suffrage claim was Mrs. Humphry Ward. Only a small proportion of the women of England, she said, had any desire for the vote; the majority were quite content that it should be confined to men. This proved that the agitation was artificial and unnecessary. It was likely, she thought, to lead to sex war. She protested (in the *Nineteenth Century* and *The Times*) against the Feminists and their methods of carrying on their campaign and she spoke at many meetings throughout the country.

In 1898 Kenneth Grahame entered light-heartedly into the fray, demonstrating with mock seriousness what might be expected to happen if the women's claim were carried to its logical conclusion; or, as the *Star* put it, he "tweaked the nose of St. Woman's Rights." His extravaganza, *The Headswoman*, appeared in the *Yellow Book*, and afterwards as a Bodley booklet. In the town of Radegonde, in the early sixteenth century, said Mr. Grahame, the office of public executioner was hereditary. The holder of the office died, leaving only a daughter and a nephew, and to the extreme surprise of the authorities the daughter appeared before them and claimed her right to succeed him. She was "a delicate-

handed, handsome girl of some eighteen summers, whose tall, supple figure was well set off by the quiet though tasteful mourning in which she was clad." The authorities found themselves, by the law of their town, obliged to agree to her demand and she was appointed headswoman, to the great disgust of her male cousin. She took an immense pride in her position and carried out her duties with skill and efficiency, and so charming was she on the scaffold that even her victims fell in love with her. It happened that a young Seigneur of the castle, returning after a long absence, was arrested (unrecognized) by the guardians of the city's peace for "carrying on rather free." Next morning he was brought to the scaffold in the place of a condemned prisoner who had escaped. He had, by chance, met the lovely headswoman on the previous day, and had fallen in love with her, and he now professed himself happy to die at her hands. They exchanged high-flown civilities as the preliminaries were adjusted, until there arrived from the castle a horrified messenger who revealed the prisoner's identity; and the story ended with the marriage of the headswoman and her high-born lover while the office lapsed to the ordinary, inartistic male.

The public read Mr. Grahame's skit with much amusement. They were at this stage more inclined to ridicule the Feminist movement than to treat its manifestos with any seriousness. Robert Hichens had made fun of the "war of the women" in his *Green Carnation*. "Sarah Grand," said Lord Reginald Hastings, "has inaugurated the era of women's wrongs." "I am so afraid she will drive poor Mrs. Lynn Linton mad," replied Mrs. Windsor. "Mrs. Linton's articles are getting very noisy. Don't you think they rather suggest Bedlam?" "To me they suggest nothing whatever," said Lord Reginald. "I cannot distinguish one from another. They are all like sheep that have gone astray."

Lord Reginald's suggestion that it was the wrongs rather than the rights of women which engrossed the attention of these eloquent combatants furnishes a means of distinction between them and the less clamorous though no less ardent body of Feminists who were working steadily and efficiently for the cause. These women did not concern themselves solely or even chiefly with the sex question and the evils incident to marriage, though they deplored these as deeply as did their more voluble sisters. Their work and their literature had a positive as well as a negative side. The words of Olive Schreiner, in her book, *Woman and Labour*, which Miss

Vera Brittain has called the Bible of the Women's Movement, may be taken as their charter:—

We demand that in that strange new world that is arising alike upon the man and the woman, where nothing is as it was, and all things are assuming new shapes and relations, that in this new world we also shall have our share of honoured and socially useful human toil, our full half of the labour of the children of woman. We demand nothing more than this and we will take nothing less. This is our "Woman's Right."

Miss Vera Brittain, who was in those days a very young recruit, says that *Woman and Labour* sounded to the world of 1911 "as insistent and inspiring as a trumpet call summoning the faithful to a vital adventure." To it was due her "final acceptance of Feminism"; and many other girls, intelligent and ardent, heard the call and answered as she did.

Olive Schreiner's earlier book, *The Story of an African Farm*, which had been received, on its publication in 1883, with the same enthusiasm that greeted *Woman and Labour*, was still widely read and held in high honour among the Feminists. Many of the pioneers who had taken part in the earlier campaign—Florence Nightingale, Frances Mary Buss, Dorothea Beale, Sophia Jex Blake, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Emily Davies, Millicent Fawcett—were still alive and actively at work. Of these Mrs. Fawcett's influence was the most widely operative. For twenty years she had been working for the women's cause, and especially for their right to vote in parliamentary elections, and the years as they passed had left her ever more strongly convinced that only through the vote could women attain to the position that would enable them to render to their country the best service of which they were capable. It was a conviction shared by an ardent band of younger women who gathered round her, and under her wise and tactful leadership carried on the campaign their elders had begun. They did not rely largely on propaganda in the form of articles and novels, though they had writers who could and did express their ideals with clearness and force. Every good book written by a woman—as every other piece of good work done—they could in a sense claim as an argument on their side, since these showed woman's fitness to exercise the rights they claimed for her. They knew, too, how to make use of the outpourings of their enemies. When on October 20,

1911, Kipling published his poem, *The Female of the Species*, with its refrain, "The female of the species is more deadly than the male," Mrs. Fawcett recited it at meetings with great gusto, "standing demure and elderly, the very pattern of the cultivated, middle-class lady." "There is something in it, I believe," says Mrs. H. M. Swanwick, "about fangs dripping blood and claws that scratched, and Mrs. Fawcett would pause now and then and say, 'That's me.' "

Rudyard Kipling's poem attracted a good deal of attention from the general public, as well as from those specially interested in the Women's Movement. On October 23rd an answer to it, called *The Species of the Female*, by Sidney Low, appeared in the *Standard*. Mr. Low sketched the development of man's conception of woman from the time that he "made a Plaster Image, and he told her it was She," through the change in ideas that caused modern taste to find "something wanting in that saint-like statuette."

So our literary gentlemen have touched it up afresh,
And have changed the plaster image to a Demon of the Flesh,
Half Mother Fiend, half Maenad; lest the generations fail,
"Armed and engined," fanged and poisoned for the hunting of the male

With the morals of the hen-coop, with the Jungle's code of law,
As described by Rudyard Kipling after (some way after) Shaw.
'Tis no doubt a graceful fancy; but the woman Time has made
Doesn't recognize the likeness so ingeniously portrayed.

And Man knows it, Mr. Poet! Knows your singular ideal
Does not bear the least resemblance to the Woman that is real;
Knows that Woman is not fiend, nor saint, nor mixture of the two,
But an average human being—"most remarkable, like you."

This, in its turn, was applauded, ridiculed, and enjoyed, and of it, too the Suffragettes made capital.

When the split came, and the party was divided into militants and non-militants, Mrs. Fawcett remained at the head of the second section while Mrs. Pankhurst led the first. Then began propaganda of a violent and disturbing sort, and the literature of the Feminists—or Suffragettes, as they were now called—came to consist mainly of comments and protests in the daily papers, reports of activities, speeches and pamphlets. The excesses of the militant section aroused great public indignation, which was extended to all, militant and non-militant, who supported the movement for Women's Suffrage.

Ridicule gave place to bitterness. "It is impossible to realize now the scorn which women who thought they should be recognized as citizens drew upon themselves from otherwise quite polite and sensible people," says Miss Lena Ashwell. ". . . Once when I went to see Tree I had in my hand a book called *The Soul of a Suffragette*, by W. L. Courtney. Tree picked it up, and with a magnificent gesture of contempt, flung it into the far corner of the room." The book told of the effect of suffrage propaganda on a young, half-educated, unawakened girl of lower middle-class parents who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for throwing a bomb through the window of a cabinet minister, and ruined in a cause she did not really understand.

Pictures of the struggle given in the novels of writers of the period tell us something of the women who were fighting in the ranks. H. G. Wells, in *Ann Veronica*, published in 1909, gives portraits of several types—the irresponsible girls of the Widgett family, who enter the fray with light-hearted carelessness; Miss Miniver, the impassioned spinster, preaching the importance of woman. "We are the species, men are only incidents. Mere hangers-on"; Ann Veronica herself, who joins the movement more out of boredom than conviction, and finds herself in prison for taking part in a raid on the House of Commons, where a month's reflection convinces her that her enthusiasm will carry her no further. Miss May Sinclair's *Tree of Heaven*, not published until 1917 but dealing with the period 1895 to 1912, shows with more sympathy and understanding another type of Suffragette. Dorothea Harrison is a graduate of Newnham, with a first-class in economics. She is passionately convinced of woman's right to the vote, joins the Woman's Franchise Union, and is a staunch and loyal member though she is not in sympathy with some of its methods. "She would fight for freedom, though not in their way and at their bidding." Incidentally it is to be noted that when she was in prison she found the Bible placed in her cell fascinating reading. "If you're to be shut up for a month with just one book it had better be the Bible," she said. "Isaiah's ripping. I can remember heaps of it." Then there is Miss Lenning, who appears in John Masefield's *Multitude and Solitude*, "A determined young woman with no nonsense about her." "One doesn't mind going to prison," she said, "I've been three times now. Besides, we shall know how to reform the prisons when we get the vote."

In 1913 Mrs. Humphry Ward presented her side of the case in *Delia Blanchflower*. She shows the militant extremist in the person of Gertrude Marvell, a highly intellectual woman, cultivated, attractive, self-sufficient, wholly devoted to the cause of woman's suffrage. Gertrude gains complete ascendancy over the young, ardent, gifted and rich Delia Blanchflower, and together they work and plot with the most advanced of the militant party. Gradually Delia realizes that evil, not good, is resulting from their efforts. She has brought unhappiness to the country village where her position gives her great influence, and the doctrines she has preached have had results she neither intended nor foresaw. Her mind changes, yet she will not desert her friend. The crisis comes when the Suffragettes set fire to a beautiful country house in Delia's neighbourhood. Gertrude Marvell fires the train, and is burnt to death in trying to save a little crippled girl who has, unknown to anyone, made her way into the house. "For that riddle of a changing time, to which Gertrude Marvell and her fellows gave the answer of a futile violence, generations more patient and more wise will yet find the fitting key," prophesied Mrs. Humphry Ward.

The key was soon to be put in the women's hands. Next year came the war, and for four years the women spent themselves in proving their love and loyalty to the country against whose law they had rebelled, and their ability to do her high and useful service. The door that had been closed to them was opened. The vote was given to them; they were Suffragettes no more. But they were still Feminists, still knocking at doors that would open to patience, courage and hard work.

CHAPTER X

CRIME FICTION

To those who were brought up under the rule of Victoria crime was not an interesting phenomenon promising exciting developments, but an evil and terrible thing of which no light treatment was permissible. Science had not then supplied its justification in the shape of complexes and inhibitions, nor had a relaxed moral code enabled it to be regarded as a mere unfortunate indiscretion. There were, inevitably, criminals in Victorian literature as there were criminals in Victorian life, but they were introduced rather to warn and terrify than to provide entertainment. The criminal was not just a necessary piece in the game that was being played, but a human being to be looked upon with pity, if also with horror. There was excitement in tracking him down, but the chase was presented as an attempt to secure justice, not as a means of obtaining an answer to a fascinating problem. When Jonas Chuzzlewit committed his midnight murder, when John Barton shot his master's son, when Silas Marner's money-bags disappeared, when Lady Audley pushed her husband down a well and Lady Mason forged the will that made her son heir to Orley Farm, it was not so much the circumstances and detection of the crime upon which the stress was laid as upon its influence in the lives of the characters of the story.

The first move towards the new crime story may be regarded as largely due to Wilkie Collins's love of an intricate and exciting plot. It was difficult to fit such a plot into the lives of the ordinary people with whom he, following the great Victorian novelists, mainly concerned himself. To involve these people in the results of a crime offered a means of complicating matters without unduly straining probability; and so, in 1860, came *The Woman in White*. Collins allowed himself a departure from Victorian tradition in making one of his villains, Count Fosco, a figure of comedy, though the other, Sir Percival, was true to the established type; and the Victorian attitude towards crime was strictly maintained. The reception given to *The Woman in White* showed that there was a large public ready to accept a story of this kind and to find pleasure in following the steps by which a crime was brought home

to its perpetrator. Still, the chief interest lay in its characters. Fosco and Marion Halcombe would have made the fortune of any book without the help of a problem to be solved.

In 1868 Collins took another step forward with *The Moonstone*. This was a true crime story after a new pattern. Here entered the detective, Sergeant Cuff, forerunner of a race of supermen to whose omniscience a fascinated public was to render large and eager tribute. He owed something to Dickens's Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House*; but Bucket was only a minor—though an immortal—character, and the solving of the murder mystery formed only a small part of the story. Yet even in *The Moonstone*, as clearly appears from contemporary comment, the characters received more attention than the plot. The public was more concerned with the fate of Rosanna Spearman than with the fate of the jewel, and followed Miss Clack's outpourings with keener interest than it gave to the ingenious experiment of Dr. Ezra Jennings. A beginning, however, had been made, and for those readers who loved to exercise their brains on problems that required ingenuity and clever guess-work, a new path to enjoyment was opened up.

Books ministering to this taste were coming from abroad. The detective stories of Emile Gaboriau, well known throughout France, had crossed to England. Edward Burne-Jones, who, some twenty years before, had been fascinated by Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, was eagerly searching the book-stall at Victoria for a work by this new expounder of mysteries, to read in the train on his way home to Rottingdean. Arnold Bennett, too, was reading Gaboriau's stories with interest, and so was Wilfrid Blunt. The cult of the detective novel was forming. Writers whose works had so far been of quite a different character were tempted to experiment in this new type of novel. Even Dickens succumbed, and in 1869 began *Edwin Drood*, which is a first-class crime story. At his death it was left unfinished, and this, probably, did more towards increasing the vogue than a complete solution of the problem he had set would have done. Dickens's admirers, who included practically the entire reading public, read the unfinished tale with the reverence due to the last words of the writer they loved, and, having read it, could not refrain from guesses as to how he had meant it to end. The subject became an absorbing one. It was discussed at dinner tables and in railway carriages, and men grew hot in their attempts to prove that the solution they favoured

was the one that Dickens had in mind. Several people published their versions of the final chapters of the story, and these also were eagerly discussed and criticized. Some readers grieved a little that Dickens should at the last have turned mystery monger. Stopford Brooke found *Edwin Drood* clever—almost too clever. "I don't like my beloved Dickens getting clever. He is always above that." Yet he read the book again and again, and so did many others, which probably inclined them to receive with favour other stories upon which the same ingenious guesswork could be exercised.

For a time the examples offered them were few and inconspicuous, and then came the great year of 1887, which started a whole company of readers on the path down which they had with some curiosity been gazing. First, there arrived from Australia a book called *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, by Fergus Hume. It had had an enormous sale in its native country; in England its success was nothing short of amazing. Clement Scott reviewed it in glowing terms. Twenty-five thousand copies were sold in three days, and yet there was a large unsatisfied demand. The libraries were besieged for it. For months no one who lived in an English town of any size could escape from *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. Those who did not read it for themselves—and of these there could not have been many—came to know it almost as well as those who did for they saw it in every bookshop and on every bookstall, found it the subject of conversation wherever they went, had advertisements of it thrust upon their notice, heard songs about it sung in the streets. The mild cult of the detective novel as it had previously existed had suddenly become a rage.

Yet *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* was not nearly as good a detective novel as *The Moonstone*. It told how a hansom cab driver, having one night taken up two gentlemen, found when he arrived at the address given him that his cab contained only the dead body of one of them. The identity of both gentlemen was unknown, and in the attempt to find the murderer the lowest haunts in Melbourne were visited, desperate characters encountered, and a melodramatic birth mystery disclosed. The murderer was discovered and the wrongly accused cleared chiefly through the efforts of a girl sweetheart and a devoted friend; there was no Sergeant Cuff, no scientific experiment. It was really a melodrama with a detective framework. Its immense popularity is to be explained not so much by its merits as by the mood of the public that received it

—a public far more eager for excitement than that which had received Wilkie Collins's masterpiece! The lurid details of the story appealed to those readers who were lovers of the horrible. Such readers exist in all ages and among all classes; among the sensation-seeking post-Victorians the taste was highly developed. *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, which Frederick Anstey has called “the most blood-curdling book in the English language,” was going through edition after edition. Mr. Herbert Palmer tells how when he was a boy of ten somewhere about 1890, he read “the most frightening ghost stories, and a popular novelette called *Dead*, about somebody who was nearly buried alive and wakened up just before being put into the coffin.” Miss Berta Ruck relates how she read a story in the *Strand* which she thought “pretty horrible, and which gave her bad dreams”; and Mr. G. W. E. Russell says: “Lady Ridley gives us in the first chapter of *A Daughter of Jael* one of the most delicate and suggestive pieces of murder writing that I, a confirmed lover of the horrible, can call to mind.” *A Daughter of Jael* was published in 1904, and the first chapter tells of a girl of eighteen who is planning the murder of her bedridden grandfather.

The real importance of *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* in the history of the crime story is that it tended to shift the interest from the criminal to the crime and to make the characters less important than the plot; and this tendency was still more marked in the second important crime story of that great year of 1887, Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. It appeared in *Beeton's Christmas Annual*, and told of a double murder committed in London by a young man, to avenge a wrong done to him and to the girl he loved by two brutal Mormons in Utah. The interest centred not on the victim or the murderer or any of their friends, but on the detective through whom came the solution of the mystery—Sherlock Holmes. With astonishing rapidity this remarkable man established himself as the familiar acquaintance of thousands of readers. “At his first appearance,” says Mr. James Agate, “(he) was a real man, having nothing to do with fiction. Conan Doyle might have protested until he was blue in the face about his character being imaginary; we should have known otherwise.” Yet he was not a real person in the sense that the characters of Shakespeare and of Dickens are real persons. He was not an ordinary many-sided man; he was an organism born, endowed, trained and brought to mar-

vellous perfection for the solving of mysteries. He was said, indeed, to have a passion for music and for black-letter editions, but no one felt that these facts had real importance.

It was this entire concentration on one object that marked Sherlock Holmes as the ideal sleuth, and Conan Doyle, in making him the chief character—the only character that mattered, for the rest were just material on which the master hand could work—hit upon a device for producing the detective story in its simplest and most telling form; for whereas in *The Moonstone* and *Edwin Drood* the interest excited by several attractive characters diverted attention from the central mystery, here the interest excited by the single character of Holmes focussed their attention upon it.

The creator of Sherlock Holmes, seeing how his detective hero had captured the public, wisely determined that his career should be prolonged. Conan Doyle had been looking for a means by which a series of stories, each complete in itself, could be linked by some common interest, and in Sherlock Holmes he found it. The second appearance of this Baker Street magician was made in *The Sign of Four*, which came out in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1889, side by side with *Dorian Gray*. After that the marvellous detective was captured by the *Strand Magazine*, in which instalments of his adventures regularly appeared for nearly four years. As a consequence the circulation of the magazine, already large, rose enormously. To go and buy your *Strand*, open it, and spend at least half-an-hour in blissful oblivion to all your personal troubles, was in those “great days of Sherlock Holmes” (as G. K. Chesterton calls them) a sort of monthly “treatment” for over-strained nerves. Mr. Herbert Asquith says that the interest in these *Strand* stories among his schoolfellows was almost universal. Sir Henry Lucy has told how, in 1894, he started on a journey to the Cape on the day of publication of the monthly number. The bookstall at Waterloo Station was piled with copies, every other passenger on the train carried one, and a large consignment went out in the ship in which they sailed. Even earlier some numbers had reached Samoa. R. L. Stevenson, who had himself tried his hand at a crime story in *The Wrong Box*, wrote to Conan Doyle in 1893, saying that he had told one of the stories, *The Engineer's Thumb*, to his native overseer, Simelé. “If you could have seen the drawn anxious features and the bright feverish eyes of Simelé you would (for the moment at least) have tasted glory.”

Mr. Conan Doyle found himself obliged to devote nearly all his time to supplying the *Strand* with its monthly instalment, and to neglect the writing of the stories of adventure in which he took much more delight. "It was the Sherlock Holmes stories for which the public clamoured," he said. How real a person the detective had become to thousands of readers was shown by the letters, coming from every quarter, that poured in on his creator, many with requests that they might be forwarded to Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Several people wished to engage his services in investigations concerned with their private affairs. Various elderly ladies, deplored what they considered his lack of comfort in his home life, offered to keep house for him. But what, more than anything else, made Mr. Conan Doyle realize how far this acceptance of Holmes as an actual man had gone, was a request from a party of French schoolboys, who were starting in a char-a-banc to visit the sights of London, that they might be taken first to the house in Baker Street, where the famous detective lived.

All this was very gratifying to Conan Doyle, but it was embarrassing also. "I felt," he said, "that I was in danger of having my hand forced, and of being entirely identified with what I regarded as a lower stratum of literary achievement." So at the end of 1893 he killed Sherlock Holmes. The great detective had for some time been engaged in tracking down a certain Professor Moriarty, the fiendishly clever head of a gang of dangerous criminals, and in the course of this pursuit the two were brought together on a narrow Alpine path with a sheer wall of rock rising on one side and a fathomless chasm, down which dashed a vast torrent of water, on the other. Here both men disappeared, but not before Holmes had contrived to leave a letter telling his friend, Dr. Watson, of his impending fate. The idea of making an end of the too popular detective had been in Conan Doyle's mind when he started with his wife for a holiday in Switzerland, and when he saw the wonderful falls of Reichenbach he thought that "here was a worthy tomb for poor Sherlock, so there I laid him, determined that he should stay there."

He was loudly and widely lamented. "I was amazed at the concern expressed by the public," said Conan Doyle. "They say a man is never properly appreciated until he is dead, and the general protest against my summary execution of Holmes taught me how many and how numerous were his friends. 'You Brute!' was the

beginning of a letter of remonstrance that one lady sent me. . . . I heard of many who wept."

By this time there were a large number of writers in the field endeavouring to supply the public with the crime stories for which it craved. "Shilling shockers" abounded. Most of these had no permanent value and were soon forgotten, but a few came near to rivalling the work of Conan Doyle. In 1894 Arthur Morrison had introduced "Martin Hewitt, Investigator," a gentleman in all points, except superhuman detective acumen, the entire opposite of the tall, lean, hawk-nosed, saturnine Sherlock Holmes. Martin Hewitt was "a stoutish, clean-shaven man, of a cheerful, round countenance," and with none of the recluse habits that marked his predecessor. He did wonderful things in the way of solving mysteries, being gifted, as Holmes had been gifted, with powers of close observation and accurate deduction, and his adventures were read by the public with great interest. But neither he nor any of the other sleuths whom various writers hopefully set to work came to life quite as Conan Doyle's creation had done. Readers still sighed for their Sherlock Holmes. The stories were collected and published as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and this book had a large sale; but re-reading increased rather than satisfied the desire for more.

For nearly three years the public lamented the great detective lying in the chasm at Reichenbach. Conan Doyle stoutly refused to raise him from the grave to which he had so firmly consigned him. Sir Evelyn Wrench, who was at this time at a preparatory school, kept by a Dr. Williams, says that at the beginning of one term, Dr. Williams told them he had been staying at the same place as Conan Doyle. He had asked this famous author whether he was going to bring Sherlock Holmes to life and was told that he was not; he had got quite sick of writing a lot of stories about him. But in the end Conan Doyle relented, and the great detective reappeared. It was explained that in the struggle between the two men Moriarty had lost his footing and fallen over into the chasm; Holmes had, with marvellous and painful exertions, climbed up the precipitous rock at the back. He had remained in hiding, it having been essential that Moriarty's confederates should believe him dead, ~~overse~~ he now reappeared in the nick of time to bring the whole and the to justice. At once his activities were renewed, and his at least) hau~~t~~ career went on. Readers welcomed him back with en-

thusiasm, and Mr. Conan Doyle resigned himself to being known as "the creator of Sherlock Holmes."

The taste for the crime story grew and strengthened. More and more writers essayed to satisfy it. Super detectives crowded the scene. Austin Freeman introduced Dr. Thorndyke, A. E. W. Mason Hanaud, and G. K. Chesterton Father Brown. Arnold Bennett, forsaking the Five Towns, produced *The Grand Babylon Hotel*. From France came the works of Maurice Leblanc, whose detective-criminal, Arsène Lupin, had for years been enthralling his countrymen, and those of Gaston Leroux, whose *La Mystère de la Chambre Jaune* Arnold Bennett declared to be "the most dazzlingly brilliant detective story" he had ever read. Yet Sherlock Holmes still remained the type and model of the great detective brotherhood; he stood for his profession as definitely as Mrs. Gamp stood for hers.

"We like crime stories because of the thrills—exactly as children like ghost stories," says Canon Hannay. Thrills these stories certainly provided in abundance. Sarah Grand, in her *Heavenly Twins*, shows Sir Shadwell Rock, the eminent nerve specialist, absorbed in the latest "shilling shocker." "Extraordinary production this, really! Most entertaining!" he declared to a fellow doctor, who had come to ask his advice on a difficult case; and continued muttering to himself while his friend took some refreshment preparatory to entering on the consultation. "Very strange, for if she didn't steal the jewels, who did? Mus'n't dip, though. Spoils it." Mrs. T. P. O'Connor says, "For many hours of breathless interest I owe Sir Conan Doyle a debt of gratitude." Sir Oliver Lodge has told how, whenever a new Sherlock Holmes appeared, his young sons would get it and insist on his reading it aloud, and Mr. Lionel Ford, then a master at Eton, how in his family, night after night, a detective story was read aloud by "Grandfather." In *Richard Meynell* Mrs. Humphry Ward shows Catherine Elsmere, widowed and ageing, suffering, as her impatient younger sister Rose declares, from a surfeit of books on "the lives of bishops and deans and that kind of thing." "My dear," says Rose to Catherine's daughter Mary, "your mother would be well in a week if we could only stop it and put her on a course of Gaboriau."

Catherine Elsmere belonged to the company—which even at the beginning of the new century was a fairly large one—of those who had not moved far enough from the Victorians, standpoint to

enable them to regard the crime story as anything but worthless and demoralizing. Many people, said G. K. Chesterton, cannot believe in a good detective story. It is, to them, like speaking of a good devil. Others with whom the crime story found no favour were those who, like Professor Saintsbury, found that it did not amuse them, or those who, like Professor Ray Lankester, could take no interest in crime. A good many people felt, as did Professor Stuart, of Cambridge, that the indulgence of a taste for crime fiction needed some sort of apology. "I confess," said the Professor,

to a covert liking for sixpenny novels of detective stories. I quite know that I occupy time in reading them, and to some extent misoccupy it, and they all, or almost all, have this fault that their characters are perfectly characterless, mere puppets working out a plot on which the author has expended all his ingenuity, but which, alas, has a horrid knack of tailing off greatly at the end. . . . Now and then, but rarely, one finds a new idea, as in *Pandora McDuffy*, named after the heroine, who will not marry her lover till he gets back his leg, which was amputated after a battle between the North and the South in the American War, and then was preserved as Specimen No. 1082 (I think) in the United States Museum, and which could not be rescued therefrom without an Act of Congress, which Act was opposed and delayed by a rival lover; or the *Midnight Special* where the murderer, the supposed murderess and the millionaire all travel down unknown to one another in a special train, and get mixed up and confused with one another, owing to a railway accident. But such gems are few and far between.

A large proportion of readers, however, avowed their preference for these stories unashamedly. They read them themselves and they allowed—even encouraged their children to read them, as is seen in the cases of Sir Oliver Lodge and Mr. Lionel Ford. Dr. Williams, says Sir Evelyn Wrench, was in the habit of reading the last instalment of the Sherlock Holmes stories to his pupils on Sunday evenings before they went to bed. Mr. Douglas Jerrold, describing what he calls his pre-Georgian childhood, says that in the evenings he used to read "Henty (of whom my mother disapproved on political grounds as tending to militarism) and at a slightly later stage Sherlock Holmes and Raffles (of whom no one disapproved)."

The disapproving—the Catherine Elsmere section—were shocked and troubled to find that men and women for whose

intellectual standing and moral rectitude they had the highest respect, read these deplorable productions with the greatest enjoyment. Mr. A. J. Balfour read them, and claimed for them a distinct value, as conducive to man's moral and physical well-being. "Overwork," he said,

means undue congestion of certain lobes of the brain. In order to draw the blood from these lobes other contiguous lobes must be stimulated. A week in the country merely means that you brood on your work. Detective novels act like iodine on a gum and provide a counter-irritant.

Mr. Balfour was in the habit of reading a detective story in bed, enjoying its thrills as a prelude to sleep. He preferred the works of the greater artists, such as Conan Doyle and Edgar Wallace. "Well, one thing has happened—Sherlock Holmes has written a new story," he is reported to have said one day in 1904. When the masterpieces failed he was driven to the poorer sort. "I have absolutely no book going except an exceedingly bad detective story," he once complained.

Mr. Asquith was "a large consumer of detective stories," and so was Lord Rosebery, who possessed a first edition of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, which he valued highly. The artist, Edward Burne-Jones, and the musician, Sir Arthur Sullivan, both delighted in the works of Conan Doyle. Dignitaries of the Church found in crime stories welcome relaxation; Bishop Talbot, we are told, regarded them as "necessary adjuncts to his holidays." Men of learning found them worthy of a place in their libraries. "Probably the most extensive library of detective stories is owned by a professor of philosophy in the north," said H. D. Thomson in his *Masters of Mystery*. William Archer was in the habit, between the acts of a play which he was attending as dramatic critic, of taking from his pocket a little book and reading it with absorbed attention. "There used to be the wildest guesses as to the nature of this little book," says Mr. Frank Swinnerton, "but I believe it was often a detective story."

Lord Birkenhead has called the detective story "a gigantic imposture practised on a credulous public." If this be so it is an imposture openly proclaimed and one to which the victims submit with gratitude. A reviewer, dealing in 1894 with one of the Martin Hewitt series, by Arthur Morrison, said:—

We recommend it to bored persons suffering the martyrdom of a family party, to harassed persons encompassed about with bills and to cheerful people weary of neurotic problems—feeling sure they will thank us.

Doubtless they did thank that friendly reviewer; but they thanked the author still more fervently.

CHAPTER XI

AMERICAN BOOKS

If, at the beginning of the 'nineties, the question, "Who is the greatest living American writer whose works are coming to England to-day?" could have been put to the English people, the answer could hardly have been a unanimous one. The only American works with which the entire English reading public was familiar were the poems of Longfellow and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; and both Longfellow and Mrs. Beecher Stowe were dead. Of the living writers each had his group, large or small, of admirers, and votes would have gone accordingly. A large, though not an enormous company, made up for the most part of readers possessing a fine and discriminating literary taste, would have replied unhesitatingly, "Henry James." A smaller, but more deeply convinced and enthusiastic group would have acclaimed Walt Whitman. There would have been a few supporters, perhaps, of W. D. Howells and Gertrude Atherton; and a tremendous response, almost religious in its fervour, from a multitude of readers proclaiming Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

A little before the 'nineties began Henry James had arrived at the point at which his relation to the reading public had been definitely determined. Fifteen years earlier *Daisy Miller* had—as his biographer, Mr. Pelham Edgar, has said—almost succeeded in making him a popular storyteller in England as well as in America. The novels that had followed had been well received. Readers had been attracted by their originality both in style and subject and had found their descriptions of American life amusing as well as interesting. We read of commendations from Arnold Bennett, Edward Burne-Jones, Robert Louis Stevenson and the Benson family. Young Arthur Benson became—and remained—a Henry James enthusiast. Archbishop Benson drew attention to *Roderick Hudson* by quoting from it in a university sermon. Altogether it seemed as if Henry James had fairly started on the road that leads to the wide bright plains of popularity.

Somehow the way was missed. In 1886 James published two more novels, *The Bostonian* and *Princess Casamassima*. They were, he thought, better than anything he had done before, and he looked

forward confidently to their raising his fame and fortune. But the public seemed, suddenly and inexplicably, to have lost interest in Henry James. They not only ignored these two latest books, but they left off buying his earlier ones. He was puzzled and distressed. "I am still staggering a good deal," he wrote to W. D. Howells, in January 1888,

under the mysterious and (to me) inexplicable injury wrought—
apparently—by my two last novels, *The Bostonian* and *The Princess*,
from which I confidently expected so much and derived so little.
They have reduced the desire and demand for my productions to
zero.

The explanation probably was that he had made too great demands upon his public. The fastidious elaboration of treatment that had at first proved attractive had become wearisome since—like the style of Meredith—it required the close and concentrated attention of the reader. His subject-matter also was criticized as trivial. The effect of reading one of his books, said Thomas Hardy, was to make one inclined to be purposely careless in detail, and James's subjects were "those that one could be interested in at moments when there is nothing larger to think of."

The next two novels did nothing towards retrieving the situation, and it became evident that Henry James had diverged too widely from the way of popularity ever to return to it. At the same time it became evident where the divergence had led him. He had mounted to a height above the heads of the ordinary crowd, and to this height a devoted body of readers were, not without toil and pains, attempting to follow him. It was such readers who were henceforward to make his real public, although a large company, remaining contentedly below, respectfully acknowledged his right to the position he held. "In the 'nineties," says Mrs. Atherton, "Henry James, and deservedly, was spoken of with bated breath as the Master."

Between 1889 and 1897 he produced no long novel, but turned to the theatre and devoted himself to the writing of plays. His genius, however, was not dramatic, and he had no great success, artistic or financial. "The pauper's grave continues to yawn," he lamented in 1896, and it was perhaps in an attempt to close this dismal chasm that he left the theatre and returned to novel-writing.

There followed *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Awkward*

Age (1899). These were received, as previous works had been received, with almost reverential admiration by the elect and puzzlement by the many. Arnold Bennett wrote in his diary, "There is scarcely an author—unless it be Henry James—whom I find flawless, and whom therefore I can read with perfect comfort." Anne Douglas Sedgwick thought *The Awkward Age* "a wonderful production, exasperating at times, but in its final effect really magnificent." The young men of the decadent cult were inclined to sneer at James's work as being products of the school that dealt only with the ordinary and eschewed the romantic. In the second number of the *Savoy*, which appeared in April 1896, Vincent O'Sullivan wrote an article, "On the Kind of Fiction Called Morbid." The public, he said, called all romance morbid, and desired only novels of the type of "the history of Miss Perfect."

For nowadays we seem to nourish our morals with the thinnest milk and water, with a good dose of sugar and not a suspicion of lemon at all. . . . Let us cling by all means to our George Meredith, our Henry James—our Miss Rhoda Broughton, if you will.

Stopford Brooke put the point of view of those who were frankly puzzled. "I have read Henry James's preface," he wrote in 1897,

and to tell you the plain truth I do not understand half of it. . . . He has now arrived at such an involved and tormented a style that I find the greatest difficulty in discovering what he means. I read and read, again and again, his sentences, and it is like listening to a language I do not know. I read his last novel but one, and I was in the same hopeless condition. I believe this style is the fine flower of modern culture and that not to appreciate it is to be in the outer darkness, but I prefer outer darkness.

Meanwhile the slim little volumes of Ella Wheeler Wilcox were selling by thousands—*Poems of Pleasure*, *Poems of Passion*, of Peace, Progress, Purpose, Problems, and, as a change from the P's, of Faith, Hope, Life, Cheer, etc. In appearance they were not unlike the volumes with which the young poets of England were filling the bookshops. They lay beside them on the counter and were opened by one after another of the curious throng that in those days came seeking the new poet who should take the place of the out-moded Victorians. A few of their wide-margined, freely spaced

pages were soon read, and if the reader were of the advanced school, he put Mrs. Wilcox's book down with a smile and a shrug of contempt. For there was nothing "ninetyish" about her work. Her "passion" had nothing to do with illicit love; her "problems" were not the problems of anguished sinners. Such a title as that of her poem *New and Old* might arouse expectation of another version of *Cynara*, but it had nothing of Dowson's weary cynicism:—

I and new love, in all its living bloom
Sat *vis-à-vis*, while tender twilight hours
Went softly by us, treading as on flowers,
Then suddenly I saw within the room
The old love, long since lying in its tomb.
It dropped the cerecloth from its fleshless face,
And smiled on me with a remembered grace
That, like the noontide, lit the gloaming's gloom.

But if the reader happened to be one of those—and there were still many—to whom sentiment was the greatest thing in poetry, and who were puzzled and a little alarmed at the poetic licence claimed by the new school, then the pages were turned with an ever-rising hope that here was the writer he was seeking, one who had a special message for that present generation. It was not only the shallow and the conventional people to whom her book thus appealed. Mrs. Wilcox had readers of a finer class—simple-hearted, duty-loving men and women, though not highly intellectual, to whom she gave cheer and comfort. Miss Naomi Jacobs, in her portrait of her friend, Margaret Broadfoote, musical artiste, presents perfectly one type of the readers who loved Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

"She wasn't clever, in fact, I have rarely met any woman who possessed so much intelligence and no intellect. In other words she

was a fool—but one of God's fools. I have her favourite books still. They are *Captain Desmond*, *V.C.*, *Candles in the Wind* and *The Way of an Eagle*. There is also a little book of poems, bound in dark violet suède, called *Poems of Passion*, several of which are marked in pencil as demanding special notice.

There were many such dainty editions of Mrs. Wilcox's works. They were in high favour as birthday presents and lovers' gifts. People who read little poetry were ready to glance through one of these attractive booklets, and their eye being caught by some

unimpeachable sentiment or pretty image, were pleased—and a little surprised—to find that here was something they could understand and admire. Mrs. Wilcox's appeal came to them as a sort of subtle flattery; it showed them that they possessed a gift of appreciation that they had believed to be entirely out of their reach; and their esteem for her work rose accordingly. She herself was conscious that she had not touched the higher thought of England. "While the English people have been most gracious and appreciative in their attitude towards my work, the English high-brow critics (like the American) have had little use for me," she said.

In 1901, when the news of Queen Victoria's grave condition reached America, Mrs. Wilcox came hurrying over to England, commissioned by her publishers to write a poem on the Queen's death and funeral. She arrived a day or two before the funeral. For some time no inspiration for her poem came to her, until at length she chanced to read in the Court news of an old number of a society journal the words, "The Queen is taking a drive to-day." That gave her an idea, and she wrote a poem describing the funeral procession, with the regularly recurring line, "The Queen is taking a drive to-day." It became immensely popular. It was set to music, Mrs. Wilcox tells us, by a friend of King Edward VII, and was sung at the memorial services on the first anniversary of the Queen's death, in the presence of all the royal family.

Mrs. Wilcox's popularity showed no sign of waning during the reign of King Edward. Father Martindale, speaking of a sermon preached by Father Bernard Vaughan in 1906, said, "No doubt it was nearer Ella Wheeler Wilcox than Walter Pater for style; but, after all, sermons are meant to be listened to, and an audience nurtured, if not on Mrs. Wilcox at least on Mrs. Glyn, would not have hearkened to the reasoning of Aquinas." Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Elinor Glyn may seem to be so far apart as to make any comparison between them quite unmeaning, but in style they had this much in common—they both loved to state the obvious in high-flown language, and they required no mental effort from their readers.

By 1910 the sale of Mrs. Wilcox's books had reached so high a figure in England that her delighted publishers arranged a great reception for her on her next visit to this country. She was the guest of honour at a luncheon given at the Holborn Restaurant, at which all sorts of notable people were present, and where speeches

acclaiming her as America's greatest poet, and the greatest living woman poet of the world, were made. She was feted by the Poetry Recital Committee; special editions of her poems, beautifully bound, were on sale at all the principal bookshops. Famous people, including Sir Henniker Heaton, publicly sang her praises. She was invited to spend a day with Marie Corelli at Stratford-on-Avon. Yet still she could not win over the select company that made up the greater part of the public of her countryman, Henry James. The more severe critics saw nothing in her poetry to praise. "I was told," she frankly confessed, "that my work was ephemeral and only ranked with the third class in literature, and that it could have no lasting effect upon the world."

Yet Henry James might well have envied her her large circulation and the pleasant income it brought her. In these things he lagged far behind. James's later novels, said Sir Edmund Gosse, were "little read except by intellectuals who never supported anybody." Joseph Conrad, writing in 1897 to Edward Garnett concerning *The Spoils of Poynton*, of which he had just received a copy from the author, praised the book highly. It was a trifle too long, he said, but personally he found no fault with that.

But I imagine with pain the man in the street trying to read it. And my common humanity revolts at the evoked image of his suffering. One could almost see the globular lobes of his brain painfully revolving, and crushing and mangling the delicate thing. As to his exasperation, it is a thing impossible to imagine and too horrid to contemplate.

It was not often that criticism dealt at any length with the characters in James's novels, the style and the working out of the story drew, perhaps, an undue amount of attention; but John Oliver Hobbes grew indignant at the presentment of Denster in *The Wings of a Dove* (1902). "I have had to tell Henry James," she said, "that he has been too hard altogether on his male protagonist in *The Wings of a Dove*. . . . I don't believe that any man ever behaved as badly as Denster." This, although she was a great admirer of his works, and was not as much affected by their difficulty as were many people.

There were some readers, Sir Edmund Gosse among them, who regarded these later novels, involved and difficult as they were, as showing Henry James at his best. *The Wings of a Dove* Anne

Douglas Sedgwick thought "the finest thing Henry James has done."

It needs a second reading; it's like a great piece of music in that; one's brain isn't really strong and acute enough to carry all the motives and dominant phrases to the end. . . . It's really a marvellous thing.

With *The Golden Bowl*, which came in 1903, James had a slight return of popularity. "*The Golden Bowl* is in its fourth edition," he wrote in 1905, "unprecedented!" But the improvement was only temporary. The public still declined to make the effort necessary for the enjoyment of his books. Even the elect sometimes felt that reading them involved a strain. That early and ardent admirer, A. C. Benson, said:—

I must frankly confess that while I regard the later books with a reverent admiration for their superb fineness and concentrated wealth of expression, they are hard work, they require unflagging patience and continuous freshness of apprehension.

It was difficult to feel on easy terms with a writer who made such large demands. James had not the brilliance that lit up the devious ways through which Meredith led his readers, and the length of his novels increased their difficulty. His short stories made much easier reading, and some people believed that these would outlive his longer works. "As a novelist his fame is secure enough," said Frederick Anstey, "and even if some of his longer fictions are less read nowadays, the author of such short stories as *Daisy Miller* and *The Turn of the Screw* is in no danger of being forgotten." His critical essays were held in the highest esteem, and it was as a critic rather than a novelist that he was best known to many people. "In the early years of King George V no critical voice had as subtle a power as that of Henry James," says Mr. Frank Swinnerton.

With all his admitted limitations, no other American novelist could rival Henry James in the estimation of the English people. He stood high and unapproachable. The stream of novels from across the Atlantic that, a little later, was to pour into England, was as yet only trickling in and attracting no special notice. W. D. Howells was probably the best known among those who were feeding it. Mary Gladstone read his works, though with no great

interest. Robert Louis Stevenson saw him as a contradiction, professing to hold "all the poor little orthodoxies of the day" yet producing work of a contrary, almost of a "heretical complexion." Henry James wrote to him, "Your literary prowess takes my breath away. You write so much and so well." Mrs. Riddell, author of *George Geith* and other novels, said:—

Of Howells I do know a little, and think a book of his might be held up to any young writer as an example of what mere command of words can do. Give him a pat of good butter, and I think he could spread it over miles of bread.

Next to Howells probably came Mrs. Gertrude Atherton, whose *Patience Sparhawk*, 1897, and *American Wives and English Husbands*, 1898, had considerable popularity. Dr. Robertson Nicoll thought Mrs. Atherton "the ablest woman writer of fiction now living," and Mrs. Robertson Nicoll said of *English Wives* that it abounded in

concise sentences and practical common sense. A book every newly married couple should take to heart. All through there is much that is worth learning—the necessity of adapting self to the new character and new surroundings.

Mrs. Edith Wharton's books did not arrive in England until near the end of the reign of Edward VII, and their fine quality was not immediately appreciated. "Probably a somewhat superior Mrs. Humphry Ward," said Arnold Bennett, after reading *The House of Mirth*.

As for the Whitman circle of readers, that was made up of both admirers and dissentients; for those who disliked either the poet's theory of life or his versification, or both, did not cease reading, but read that they might confute and confound his upholders. No poet, probably, has provided more material for controversy than Whitman, and this, for the rising generation of the 'nineties, formed part of his charm; for they loved controversy. They loved, too, theories of life; and Whitman's versification, though his *Leaves of Grass* had been published thirty-five years before, was still sufficiently strange and unusual to commend itself to their attention. "In Walt Whitman," said Mr. Kenneth Grahame long afterwards, looking back over fifty years to the days of his youth, "we had novelty, but we had as well original genius of a high order."

Robert Louis Stevenson's essay on Whitman, written in 1882, had done much to spread a knowledge of the poet's work among English readers. Stevenson, in his own adolescent "greensickness," as he called it, had found healing in Whitman, and he had become one of his most enthusiastic admirers, though in his essay he acknowledged the poet's many faults, and brought out clearly the twosidedness that repelled and puzzled many readers. Whitman, he said, was "a most surprising compound of plain grandeur, sentimental affectation, and downright nonsense." He was a poet, but he was also a "Bull in a China Shop." Canon Barnett read the essay in 1890 and said it put exactly what he thought about the American poet.

A good many people saw only what may be called the fleshly side of Whitman's poetry. "I have learnt," said young Jim Formalden, of John Oliver Hobbes's *The Dream and the Business* . . . "that people who are for ever talking about the body—call it Walt Whitmanese—are generally unwholesome." Meredith thought Whitman dangerous. Gerald Manley Hopkins's comment is probably not to be taken seriously. "I always knew in my heart," he said, "Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel this is not a pleasant confession." On the other hand, Canon V. S. Coles, the eminent Tractarian, gave a copy of *Leaves of Grass* to Douglas Goldring; and he, then (1904) a lad of seventeen, sat up all night to read it. "I have the book still," he says, "much thumbed and annotated." It was in that same year that Edward Garnett wrote to John Galsworthy, "Try reading Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* again, I always find it so inspiring." Four years later Richard Le Gallienne was writing, in *Zion Chapel*, of two young men who tried to startle the town of Coalchester into intellectual life by introducing (among other writers) to its inhabitants "a strange old American father called Walt Whitman." So from one to another the youth of that day handed on the torch Whitman had lighted, and though it caused no great conflagration it seemed in no danger of extinction.

Whitman's versification offered even more scope to the enemy than did his subject-matter. It was so unlike anything anyone had heard before, and even his admirers had to admit that it often fell into monotony and harshness. Tennyson said Whitman had not the first requisite for a poet, he could not sing. Swinburne compared him to a drunken applewoman rolling in the gutter. He was, or

appeared to be, an easy prey to the parodist. R. W. Raper parodied him in the *Oxford Magazine*, to the delight of the whole university.

Behold, I am not one that goes to lectures or the pow-wow of Professors,
The elementary laws never apologize; neither do I apologize.
I am one who goes to the river.
I sit in the boat and think of "life" and of "time,"
How life is much, but time is more; and the beginning is
everything,
But the end is something.

Emerson, although he had died in 1882, still kept his place among the prophets. In the 'nineties it was still essential that anyone with pretensions to culture should know something about his *Essays*, and many people who did not really appreciate him read him for that reason. But there were others to whom he was, in a very real sense, a guide and helper. Lord Snell says:—

Emerson was a most comforting person to live with. He approached the problems of life with a perpetual smile, and the sunny optimism of his essays always inspired and consoled. It was to him that I went whenever life's burdens were heavy, and I seldom went in vain.

Other readers, though they might find guidance, did not always find comfort in his message. John Oliver Hobbes shows one of her characters opening Emerson and reading:—

Do you love me? means, Do you see the same truth? If you do we are happy with the same happiness; but presently one of us passes into the perception of a new truth. We are divorced, and no tension in nature can hold us to each other.

This presented a solution to the problem that was perplexing the reader, but a hard and bitter one. To the people who found so much in Emerson it seemed incredible that a great body of readers found nothing, and were simply bored; and we can sympathize with the rather severely intellectual Mrs. Majendie, of Miss May Sinclair's *The Helpmate*, who, having read aloud Emerson's essay, *On Compensation*, to her husband (the same who had failed in his contest with Meredith), found that her missionary effort had been wasted, since he declared he had not understood a word of it.

Longfellow had died in the same year as Emerson and, unlike

him, had not kept the place he had won among English readers. The slightly superior attitude which had from the first been taken up towards him had become intensified. To admire Longfellow now was to confess oneself hopelessly middle class and early Victorian. By the "intellectuals" he was despised; nothing would have induced the advanced young people to admit any further acquaintance with him than faint childish memories of some of his most hackneyed poems. Yet in most houses a volume of his poems was to be found in the family bookcase or on the drawing-room table, and in the hundreds of comfortable, undistinguished homes to which the new culture had not reached the children were still brought up on his works. Mr. Herbert Palmer says that during his boyhood, in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties, Longfellow was probably the poet most widely read, with Mrs. Hemans coming second. He himself read and enjoyed both these writers until he was well on in his teens. Lord Snell has recorded that one of the poets who deeply impressed him in the early 'nineties, when he was about twenty-five years old, was Longfellow. Jerome K. Jerome wrote of his twenty-fifth year:—

My favourite poet just then was Longfellow. It has become the fashion to belittle him. Perhaps his verse does not always reach the level of, say, *The Building of the Ship*. But even Wordsworth nods. To youth, face to face with giants, he will long remain a helpful voice.

The many readers of that popular author, Miss Edna Lyall, came across Longfellow constantly in the quotations that headed her chapters; and in *We Two* Hiawatha and the "very strong man Kwasind" took a prominent part. Miss Sarah Grand also quoted Longfellow with seriousness and approval—probably somewhat to the surprise of her readers. And it is clear that both Uncle Ponderevo, of H. G. Wells's *Tono Bungay* and his young assistant, Ewart, had been nurtured on Longfellow since both could recall that poem "that sounds exactly like the first declension. What is it?—'Man's a maker, men say,' " and which tells about "a carpenter and a poetic Victorian child, you know, and some shavin's. The child made no end out of the shavin's."

The 'nineties passed and the Edwardian age began, and still Longfellow kept a circle of readers, though a diminishing one. Miss Vera Brittain has told us how, at her home at Macclesfield,

a copy of Longfellow's poems "bound in a bilious mustard-brown leather," lay upon a whist table in the drawing-room, and how she, an eager, book-starved child of eight, fell upon it as upon some rare treasure.

I soon had Longfellow's poems—including *Tales of a Wayside Inn* and the New England series—by heart, and even now when I am searching through my memory for an appropriate quotation "Life is real" and "Hadst thou stayed" will insist upon ousting A. E. Housman and Siegfried Sassoon.

Most of us whose youth fell between 1880 and 1910 can remember passing through our Longfellow stage; and we have seen our juniors smile with indulgent superiority when we have confessed that we held a firm belief in the poetic qualities of "Robert of Sicily, brother of Pope Urbane" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus." It was Longfellow's fate, as it has been the fate of other poets, that his noblest and most weighty works sank first into oblivion, leaving behind them only such light and inconsiderable trifles as could be maintained in the memories of a generation for whom a rush of new impressions was submerging the old. This process was going on with exceptional energy during the years that came between Queen Victoria's first jubilee and the Great War; and Longfellow's verse suffered proportionately.

There was one department of American literature, however, which throughout that period remained serene and safe, above the threatenings of oblivion. The children's books that had made so triumphant an entry in the 'sixties still held their own. *Little Women*, *The Wide, Wide World*, *The Lamplighter* and *What Katy Did* were still read by most English girls, as were *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Last of the Mohicans* by the boys. A later series, *The Elsie Books*, which began to arrive from America about 1886, was not so successful. There were twenty-eight of these books, and they told the story of a certain Elsie Dinsmore and her descendants from her earliest years to her career as a grandmother. Not many English readers got through the whole series. Miss G. B. Stern says that she did, and that the stories gave her extraordinary pleasure, but she owns to having grown a little impatient with them. Elsie was too entirely the blameless heroine. She had none of the blundering imperfections that had endeared Jo March to countless girls and boys. She went through life a ministering spirit,

converting her unregenerate friends and relations by her shining example. America, in her children's literature, seemed to have lost the homely common sense that had salted the sentimentality of her previous achievements, for in the next notable book of the class, by Frances Hodgson Burnett, which came to England there appeared a type as perfect as Elsie and even more sugary-sweet. This time it was a boy, Cedric Dorincourt, little Lord Fauntleroy. He was sent to live with his grandfather, who was an earl and a man of iron, and by his childish beauty and charm, and the loving unselfishness of his nature, he entirely transformed that stern old man and brought about reconciliation and forgiveness all round. The book took a certain portion of the English public by storm. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was read by old and young alike. Cedric became the idol of many mothers and the model of what they wished their own darlings to be. They dressed their boys in imitation of him in velvet suits with wide sashes and lace collars—as Miss Ellen Aldin says her brothers were dressed, to their extreme discomfiture. The present writer remembers being set to read *Little Lord Fauntleroy* aloud to a sewing class of about fifty girls, aged twelve to fifteen. The girls listened with absorbed interest, and when the false heir was introduced and Cedric's inheritance was in danger they held their breath; at the little boy's artless and noble reception of the news they sobbed aloud, while the reader—aged eighteen—quite broke down, the teacher—aged perhaps forty—caught the infection, and all wept comfortably together. Only the sternest of realists could resist that preposterously charming little prig. Mrs. Riddell, a woman of abounding and somewhat embittered common sense, wrote to a friend who had sent her the book:—

Here is *Little Lord Fauntleroy* with many thanks. I am very glad indeed to have read it. The story is pretty, but I quite fail to see the reason for such a fuss as has been made about it. In every respect Mrs. Ewing's books are better. . . . A testimonial is being got up by the Secretary of the Incorporated Society of Authors—whatever that may be—for Mrs. Burnett. Subscriptions limited to two guineas. I have no hesitation in saying it is because the book is a cross between a tract and a play.

Little Lord Fauntleroy did not join the company of *Little Women* and *What Katy Did*. In a very few years it ceased to attract and faded out of remembrance; which, with the disappearance of Ella

Wheeler Wilcox, seems to indicate that what England wanted from America was not a new brand of sentimentalism, but some fresh and illuminating outlook on human life, even though, as in the case of Emerson, of Whitman and of Henry James, she found it difficult to understand.

CHAPTER XII

SCIENCE AND ROMANCE

SCIENTIFIC literature formed a very small part of the reading of the ordinary man in these later days of Queen Victoria. The books which recorded the researches of the band of great Victorian scientists whose work was to bring in a new era, were not popular in character, and were read mainly by students. The general public knew and respected the names of Lord Kelvin, Lord Rayleigh, J. J. Thomson, Sir Robert Ball, Francis Galton and their fellow workers, but it had only the vaguest idea as to what these men were doing. No great controversial book, such as Darwin's *Origin of Species*, had come to infuse science with passion. For many people, indeed, especially to those who were violently opposed to its theories, this book still represented the essential spirit of the scientific movement; so that it stood for them, as it had stood for their fathers in the 'sixties, as the destroyer of truth, the manifestation of Antichrist, the weapon of the carnal man warring against the spirit. The young people who in their schools were gathering some idea—slight and inadequate, but such as had been within the reach of no previous generation—of the true principles of science were many of them roused and excited at the thought of its possibilities, but in general their education had not gone far enough to enable them to grapple with any but the most elementary text books and such popular and not very valuable treatises as the lesser writers put forward.

There was one class of readers to whom, for reasons other than those of the anti-Darwinites, the name of science was abhorrent. These may be called the Romantics, the people to whom science appeared as the deadly foe of grace and beauty and high imagination. They were, many of them, ardent disciples of Ruskin, whose teaching, though scorned and discredited by advanced opinion, still had a strong hold on a large body of his countrymen. A good many others who were too obstinately conservative, too inert or too timid to welcome change of any kind joined the Romantics, believing themselves, probably, to be moved by the same motives.

The romantic man hated and feared science, and he hated and

feared still more its outward and visible sign, the machine. He quoted his Ruskin:—

Hand labour on the earth, and the harvest of it brought forth with singing; not steam-piston labour on the earth, and the harvest of it brought forth with steam whistling. You will have no prophet's voice accompanied by that shepherd's pipe and pastoral symphony. . . . By hand labour also to plough the sea; both for food and in commerce and in war; not with floating kettles there, neither, but with hempen bridle and the winds of heaven in harness.

He rejected with scorn the argument that the benefits conferred by the machine outweighed the injuries that its use had inflicted on the world. He predicted dismal things for the future when this monstrous Frankenstein should have reached its full stature. He applauded Samuel Butler who, thirty years before, had foreseen what might happen if this malignant growth were not checked. Butler's *Erewhon*, after long neglect, was gaining a widening circle of readers, and the story of how the Erewhonians had dealt with the problems of government was spreading. They had, for one thing, ordered the destruction of all machinery, even watches and clocks, and had made it a punishable offence for any inhabitant of the country to possess a piece of mechanism of any sort. For, they said:—

This is the art of the machines—they serve that they may rule. They bear no malice towards man for destroying a whole race of them, provided he creates a better instead; on the contrary, they reward him liberally for having hastened their development. It is for neglecting them that he incurs their wrath, for using inferior machines or for not making sufficient exertions to invent new ones, or for destroying them without replacing them; yet these are the very things we ought to do and do quickly; for though our rebellion against their infant power will cause infinite suffering, what will not things come to if that rebellion is delayed.

What, indeed? asked many people in England. Man would lose control of his world and see it given over to a rule inexorable and soulless; and joy and beauty would vanish. Imagination would wither and romance be blotted out.

It was at the time when these dismal forebodings were filling the minds of a certain section of readers that the works of the new writer, young Rudyard Kipling, were becoming known throughout

the country. Foremost among those who welcomed him were the lovers of romance. He sang them ballads with the sound of the sea in them, and told them stories full of the wonders of far-off lands. They thrilled to the words of his "dreamer" who in the "man-stifled town" saw the Vision and followed it into the wild; and when, in *The Light that Failed*, his hero, Dick Heldar, tried to entice Maisie into marriage by recounting the glories of the "little heavens" existing in "islands tucked away under the Line" to which he would take her, they felt that this was the right, romantic way for a man to woo his bride.

But soon, almost with consternation, the romantics became aware that into this Paradise created by Mr. Kipling the hated machines were—not intruding, that was obviously not the right word, for the machines were part of the Paradise, part, even, of its charm. There they were. In his ballad, *The King*, Mr. Kipling sang how every age had, in its turn, sighed that romance had departed when some invention had displaced the old and substituted the new; and he maintained that the "nine-fifteen" train of to-day was as much under the rule of romance as the coach or the sailing ship. Then there was that other poem, *Sapper*, starting with the assertion that "The Lord he created the Engineer," and going on to tell of the great works wrought by the engineer from the time of the Flood to the present time. There was that fine story, *The Bridge Builders*; did any of the knights of old adventure more gallantly than these pioneers? Into poem after poem, story after story, came the ugly and despised machines that had, as these puzzled readers held, destroyed poetry and flattened imagination. Even Dick Heldar turned from his pictures of jade-green waterfalls laced with silver and red sandstone palaces built on honey-coloured sands, to gaze with rapture on a passing steamer and, almost fondly, to enumerate the details of her mechanism. "In the 'nineties Mr. Kipling had amazed everybody by the uncanny exactitude of his acquaintance with machinery," says Mr. Wingfield Stratford. There was no idealization or shirking of fact. The machines were described with the loving detail such as other poets have spent on celebrating the charms of their ladies.

The most determinedly romantic reader was forced to admit that in no case did these descriptions mar the beauty or deaden the spirit of the poems or the stories. Instead, the machines took on life and personality, and played their parts with the other

characters of the author's creation. "Mr. Kipling," says John Freeman," returns to the inspired methods of the nursery, and through the eyes of childish wonder interprets the voice of machinery, horses, wild monsters and railway engines. They all talk." Readers, whether they liked it or not, found themselves obliged to agree with G. K. Chesterton when he said that among Mr. Kipling's best stories were those which told of "engineers or sailors or mules or steam engines."

The service which Kipling had thus rendered to science was real and considerable. He had not, it is true, banished the conception of science as incompatible with romance which existed—and exists—in the minds of a good many people. But those who had valued machinery before had learned now to love it, and those who had hated it had become to some extent reconciled. He had turned the machine from a monster into a marvel. No reader of his works could think henceforward of the most highly mechanized and noisiest factory as something entirely prosaic, and some, at least, would think more respectfully, if not more kindly, of the guiding power behind all this energy, the power that they called science.

There was another writer, also, who in these days set out to demonstrate the wonders of science and of the machine. The method of this writer, Mr. H. G. Wells, was not the method of Kipling; nor was it the method of his predecessor in the field of scientific romance, Jules Verne. Verne had dealt with actual possibilities of invention and discovery. Mr. Wells, as he himself said, set aside possibility. His romances were pure exercises of the imagination. He was a young man when, in 1894, his first scientific romance, *The Time Machine* was coming out in Henley's *New Review*, and he wrote with the gusto and assurance that belongs to youth. There was no subtlety about his story, no attempt to humanize the machine. The Time Machine which he presented to his readers was a mechanism by means of which its manipulator could transport himself into the past or into the future, choosing his period at will; and on the experiences of the man who made trial of its powers was built up a most exciting story. Its novelty and its extravagance fell in with the taste of the day, and there was a strong demand for more of the same sort. The *Quarterly* looking back in 1908 over Mr. Wells's series of scientific romances, said,

No inconsiderable part of his originality is due to the fact that he happened to appear in a period of unsettlement, when the English mind was, for the first time, losing hold of the world of experience and groping wildly in a world of theory.

Other writers tried their hand at the scientific romance, but none with the abandon and success of Mr. Wells. For more than ten years he produced one or more of these fantasies every year. Most of them were, like the *Time Machine*, pure exercises of the imagination; some, like *The Sleeper Awakes*, carried suggestions of his social ideals; a few contained foreshadowings of scientific discoveries of the future. Of *The War in the Air* which came in 1908, Stopford Brooke wrote, "a terrible, but quite possible outlook."

All these romances found many eager readers. T. W. H. Crosland maintained that Mr. Wells's admirers were to be found mainly among the Suburbans. "For years," he wrote,

Mr. Wells has been delighting countless thousands of Suburbans with a formula that suggests in effect that it is not imaginatively impossible for a man to develop a glass cuticle or a woman a talking apparatus all round her head. With fancies of this nature Mr. Wells has repeatedly ravished the readers of *Pearson's Magazine* and similar organs of culture, which readers are suburban to a soul.

This is clearly unfair. Mr. Wells's readers extended far beyond Suburbia. Mr. A. J. Balfour read the romances with great enjoyment. Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, although in a long notice in the *Saturday Review* he challenged the scientific basis of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (which appeared in 1896, and was about beasts being converted into human beings by means of vivisection), yet says, "Like the rest of the world I am indebted to him for many hours of excellent reading." Conrad considered Wells a very original writer with an astonishing imagination, and wrote to him concerning *The Invisible Man*.

If you want to know what impresses me it is to see how you contrive to give over humanity into the clutches of the Impossible and yet manage to keep it down (or up) to its humanity, to its flesh, blood, sorrow, folly. That is the achievement.

Of *The War of the Worlds* which followed in 1898 and was about a horrible but highly organized race living on Mars and

planning to invade England, Conrad did not think so highly; but this work made more sensation among the general public than any that had gone before it. Sir Sidney Low tells how Lady Jeune, who liked to have all the celebrities of the day at her famous evening parties, asked him to introduce her to its author. Mr. Wells became the fashion, and those who had not read his books before now made haste to do so.

Young people found the ingenuity of the stories and their exuberant assumption of infallibility and omniscience—what Henry James called Mr. Wells's “cheek”—irresistible. The stories delighted young John Middleton Murry and they delighted the young sons of Sir Oliver Lodge. E. F. Benson, looking back on that felicitous period when Mr. Wells was “weaving the most wonderful stories about men from Mars, and men in the moon, and a machine that could push time forward through lapses of uncounted aeons and show us the earth growing cold,” sighed that such a dreamer had not “gone on dreaming his sumptuous nightmares” but, awakening, had decided that his mission was to reform the world. Many other readers were equally regretful. They did not like Mr. Wells in his new character nearly as well as in his old. With many, as with Mr. A. J. Balfour, he was “dropped when he began to preach.” An enjoyable phase had ended. It had not been a very fruitful or inspiring phase. Readers had not carried much away from it except, perhaps, a conception of science as a powerful but fantastic force, not tending greatly either to beauty or usefulness; possibly, also, a quickened sense of the excitement of living in these modern times. Mr. Shane Leslie calls Mr. Wells “the chemical and mechanized romanticist of his time. An interest in science served him and his readers in place of a love of chivalry.” The true Romantics found little in his stories to attract them; the monster they dreaded was still a monster, and had taken on added terrors. John Freeman has said in his book, *The Moderns*:—

He (Mr. Wells) gives but what he has to give, and does not pretend that it is more; it is for us to remember that there is an infinite more which Mr. Wells, if he live to be a hundred, will never be able to give.

Science, besides ruling over one particular type of romance, began to invade other departments of fiction. Towards the end of

the 'nineties Mrs. L. T. Meade and Mr. Robert Eustace wrote a series of crime stories in which the chief agency was a scientific or mechanical device functioning with uncanny malignity. Thus, one story tells how a victim, seated in a chair on a verandah, was suddenly by means of hidden machinery thrown with extreme violence far away into the middle of a common so that when his body was found there was no possible clue to the source of his injuries. In another, death came through an electrically controlled apparatus; in a third, a dog with a vessel containing dynamite and with a time-fuse attached fastened on his head was sent in pursuit of the man marked down for death; in a fourth, detection of a crime was brought about by placing a grain of arsenic in the fountain-pen used by the suspected person. These stories, though they did not reach the popularity of the Sherlock Holmes series, attracted many readers to whom science made a special appeal.

Another story which may be called a scientific romance, though of a type totally different from the romances of H. G. Wells, was Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It was published in 1886, and made a considerable sensation, though most persons accepted it simply as an allegory, and ignored the very clear and definite description of the scientific means by which the change of personality is brought about. "It was read," says Stevenson's biographer, Mr. Graham Balfour, "by those who never read fiction, it was quoted in pulpits and made the subject of articles in religious newspapers." As an allegory it appealed to J. H. Shorthouse, author of *John Inglesant*. He thought it "a very remarkable effort," the most horrible story he had ever read and "a perfect allegory told with realistic skill." Even after the first sensation had died down it continued to be widely read and eagerly discussed. Its presentation of a dual personality attracted those who were interested in the new developments of the science of psychology, at that time drawing much public notice, and its thrilling incidents satisfied those who came to it merely as a story. Arnold Bennett did not read it until 1904, and then he criticized it on its scientific side. After Wells, he said, "it comes feeble. No future novelist will be able to 'fudge' science now that Wells has shown us it can be done without fudging." He thought the part about taking the powder "childish and unconvincing," but the psychology of the last chapter he praised as being "really good and subtle." Rider Haggard was less explicit. "*Jekyll and Hyde*

has always seemed to me one of the most remarkable things of its sort in the English language," he said.

Nothing that can be classed as quite "of its sort" followed. Walter Besant wrote *The Ivory Gate*, which showed a lawyer of the conventional type, dry, unbending, severely just, who in his hours of relaxation became a lavishly benevolent old gentleman, overflowing with loving-kindness towards the poor and the sorrowful; but the change was accompanied by no physical transformation, except that his expression passed from the stiff to the benign. Galsworthy read it in 1893, and commented, "It is very nice," which, as a criticism, seems entirely satisfactory and complete.

George du Maurier's *Peter Ibbetson*, which came in 1890, was concerned not with a change of personality, but with the possibility of a dual life. It is the autobiography of a man who professed to have learnt the art of "dreaming true," that is of projecting himself, in a dream, into the past, and re-living all its incidents, even those he has forgotten. If a companion of that past has also learnt the art of dreaming true, the two can meet in their dream and re-live their lives together. Peter Ibbetson, the author of the autobiography, was an inmate of a criminal lunatic asylum who had been sentenced to imprisonment for life for a murder committed in a fit of justifiable fury. It was while he was in prison that he learnt to dream true, and so was enabled, night after night, to meet the lady he loved and escape with her into a world of beauty and happiness while apparently he was lying asleep in his cell. To quote his own words:—

I had but to take her hand, and one of us had but to wish, and lo! wherever either of us had been, whatever either of us had seen or heard or felt or even eaten or drunk, there it was all over again to choose from, with the other to share in it—such a hypnotism of ourselves and each other as was never dreamed of before.

Peter Ibbetson, apart from its dream theories, was an interesting and delightful story, especially in its earlier chapters which told of its author's childhood. It was born, says Du Maurier's daughter, of memories of "the pageantry of the past, threaded with stray thoughts and long forgotten dreams." Edward Burne-Jones wrote to Du Maurier:—

I'm reading your story and have nearly finished it. I love you for having written it. Somehow I was trying to make up my mind

to be content and not grumble at the ugly, squalid, vicious tales that people like nowadays. I thought the world was going all one way and that I had better make peace while there is time and reconcile myself to it, and here comes your book like a fresh wind —full of beauty and beautiful people.

Peter Ibbetson attracted a good many readers but it made no sort of sensation; that was reserved for Du Maurier's next book, *Trilby*, which came in 1894. Here the psychological interest lay in the hypnotism practised upon the heroine, the luckless, inimitable Trilby, artists' model; but here, as in *Peter Ibbetson*, the story itself and its characters proved the greatest attraction to readers. *Trilby* came out first as a serial in *Harper's Magazine*, and caused the circulation to rise enormously. "People are buying *Harper's* now chiefly on account of *Trilby*," wrote John Oliver Hobbes, "which shows that even in London there is still a taste for a good serial." The fate of the captivating heroine was closely followed by many readers. "Are you going to kill Trilby or be kind to her?" wrote Burne-Jones. "I cannot have you kill her. You may polish off as many men as you like in the process of her career, and they must endure their fate with courage, proud to be crushed by such feet, but no harm beyond a heartache or so for Trilby, as you love me."

Alas, before the end of the year the adored, fascinating Trilby was dead. But now her admirers increased a hundredfold. Her story was published in book form, and at once the public fell upon it. "The *Trilby* boom was one of the most sensational events that ever happened," says Du Maurier's daughter; "people went mad about the book both in England and America." Over a hundred thousand copies of it were sold; the story was dramatized, and the play was the success of the season. Nobody could help loving poor Trilby and grieving over her sad end. "The first book I could read with pleasure after my loss" (the death of his wife) "was *Trilby*," said Leslie Stephen. "There is *Trilby*," said Mrs. Panton, recounting the books she loved, "the divine, deathless *Trilby* with its tender personal touches and sidelights and remembrances that touch me so much I can scarcely read the book." The appeal of *Trilby*, in spite of its scientific element, was to the heart rather than to the intellect, and some people in that intellect-loving age were puzzled to account for the wonderful reception accorded to it. Frederick Anstey tells how once Henry James said to him,

"Let us find a seat and sit down and endeavour—if it is in any way possible to arrive at a solution—to discover some reason for such a phenomenon as the success of *Trilby*."

Du Maurier's next book, *The Martian*, appeared in 1897. It told how a dream influence from Mars supplied inspiration to dwellers on earth; but Du Maurier was not quite happy in his invasion of Mr. Wells's territory. Characteristically, for him the inhabitants of Mars were a noble race, not creatures of fear and horror. *The Martian* was a pleasant story and its earlier chapters had something of the charm of *Peter Ibbetson*; but after *Trilby* it fell flat.

As the years went on the achievements of science were brought more vividly before the notice of the general public and interest in them quickened. Scientific romance began to pale. Men found more excitement in reading about actual adventurers in the air than in fantastic accounts of imaginary flights. The far-off worlds whose existence had actually been proved by science rivalled in interest the worlds created by the novelist. Electricity accomplished marvels beside which communication with men in the moon seemed tame. Psychology attacked problems as baffling and more generally important than that of a dual personality. It seemed as if some true understanding of the real romance of science was at hand.

CHAPTER XIII

THE NOVELS OF THE 'NINETIES

ONE of the signs of that diversity which was characteristic of the 'nineties is the large variation in intention, manner and appeal shown in the works of the different novelists who were most widely read and talked about during that period. The great Victorian novelists, though each was profoundly individual, yet belonged to one school; and the lesser writers followed them. They dealt for the most part with the lives of ordinary people. They did not write to expound a philosophy; they did not challenge their readers to a contest in verbal gymnastics. Their chief aim was to tell a story; their "purpose," when they had one, was concerned with the social evils of their day. Among the novelists of the 'nineties there was no such unity. They went further afield, they sought for the unusual and the abnormal. Some allowed themselves an involved and difficult style. Some treated character from the stand-point of the psychologist. Some let the purpose triumph over the story. Many of their novels—*Robert Elsmere*, *Soldiers Three*, *Dorian Gray*, *The Heavenly Twins*, for example—were the organs of the author's particular school of thought, and the story was shaped by and subordinated to the underlying idea. Of the novelists whose works were not so subordinated it is sufficient to name the four most popular—Meredith, Hardy, Hall Caine, Marie Corelli—to demonstrate how wide the diversity was. An incongruous quartette; yet it seems evident that almost every novel reader of the 'nineties read the works of one or more of its members, though no one of them was read by the entire reading public, as was Dickens, or by that large proportion of it that read the works of Dickens's great contemporaries.

Meredith's fame was established, though his public was still a comparatively small and highly specialized one—"the acute but honourable minority," as he himself called it. In the 'seventies and 'eighties it had been made up of a small group of those intelligent, modern young men and women who had been the first to show signs of emergence from the strong and prevailing influence of Victorianism. Their admiration had been nourished upon *Richard Feverel*, *Evan Harrington*, *Emilia in England*, *Vittoria*,

Rhoda Fleming and *Harry Richmond*—masterpieces not surpassed by any of Meredith's later works. They had gloried in the name of Meredithians, and had felt—most of them—that their title to it gave them a certain intellectual distinction which raised them above the class of common readers. They had not faltered in their allegiance as time had gone on, and had received *Beauchamp's Career*, *The Egoist*, *Diana of the Crossways*, *One of Our Conquerors* and *Lord Ormont and his Aminta* with the same enthusiasm that they had shown for the earlier works. These early admirers included many—Justin McCarthy, Sir George Trevelyan, Bernard Bosanquet, Lady de Rothschild, Grant Allen, John Lane and Richard Bentley among them—whose names now carried weight as literary authorities. There was also left over from those early days a convinced and vigorous opposition. All these by their praises and their attacks had made Meredith so far an object of general interest as to arouse in most intelligent readers—and in some who were not intelligent as well—a desire to try the books for themselves; and the great effort having been made, some joined the admirers, some the opposition, some were divided in their opinion; while many after a trial of one novel gave it up and read no further.

Such was the position at the opening of the 'nineties. The new band of admirers was made up of readers as eager and as intelligent as their forerunners, and not very much more numerous. Meredith had no great attraction for the young people of that day. He did not give them ready answers to the questions that perplexed them; and what message he had must be disentangled with care and pains from the glittering, intricate web of words he had woven round it. Only a few were ready to do this; and only a few found pleasure in the real intellectual effort that was necessary for the appreciation of the story. John Galsworthy, while still in his twenties, said that Meredith's novels gave him more pleasure than those of any other English writer because they excelled all others as novels of character. "Oh, why has he not written fifty novels!" sighed Anne Douglas Sedgwick, a still younger admirer after reading all those he had written twice over. Mr. H. G. Wells makes young Dick Remington of his *New Machiavelli* declare *One of Our Conquerors* to be "one of the books that have made me." But for young people generally—as for many adults—Meredith had not enough warmth and abandon to make his books more than works of art, highly rated, but not loved. Conan Doyle thought him "clever, but neither

interesting nor intelligible," and Miss Katherine Bradley put the same idea with greater elegance when she said, "In Meredith the living heart rarely kindles the overplus of intellect."

For the true Meredithians, however, it was this intellectual brilliance that gave his works their greatest attraction. It attracted also a large number of painstaking readers who, admiring intellect above all things, and longing to be—and to be recognized as—its possessors, often succeeded in persuading themselves—and others—that they read with pleasure. Earnest young men and women belonging to Literary Societies wrote papers full of psychology and sociology, ethics and dialectics on the works of Meredith but usually failed to convince the unregenerate majority among their fellow members. The present writer remembers one such society, which contained a single Meredith enthusiast, who, after persevering efforts, managed to get *Sandra Belloni* set down for reading and discussion. Unfortunately the effect on her fellow members was not what she had hoped for. They met in ribald mood declaring that the only part of the book they had been able to understand and appreciate was the scene in which the father of the heroine threw nine large potatoes at his daughter's lover when he came upon the two taking an unauthorized walk together, and her attempts to enlighten them only produced further irreverences. The Meredithians were perhaps not altogether disappointed when their proselytizing efforts failed. They could always attribute it to the inferior capacity of those outside their charmed circle. There was, indeed, often a faint trace of arrogance about these ardent disciples, an air of

There is no place in heaven for you,
We can't have heaven crammed.

When readers complained that Meredith was obscure a tinge of complacency could be observed in the mien of some of these favoured ones, as who should say, "Not to us." The obscurity, they maintained, was due to the novels being so closely packed with meaning; one page would dilute into a hundred pages of the works of most other novelists, declared Bernard Bosanquet. James Barrie, when he was a young man of twenty-eight, gave his views on Meredith's alleged obscurity in an article in the *Contemporary Review*, in 1888.

He reaches his thought by means of ladders which he kicks away, leaving his readers to follow as best they can, a way of playing the game that leaves him comparatively free from pursuit. Too sluggish to climb, the public sit in the rear, flinging his jargon at his head, yet aware, if they have heads themselves, that one of the great intellects of the age is on in front.

The public as a whole, however, continued to estimate the reward offered by Meredith as not worth the effort necessary to reach it.

The public sturdily declines to look at *Beauchamp's Career*, puts aside with a "thank you" *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*, and would as soon think of plunging into a Parliamentary Blue Book as of tracing the mental zig-zags and psychological evolutions of Sir Willoughby Patterne,

wrote the *Quarterly* in an article on Meredith's works in October 1891. When in 1894 Mr. Robert Hichens set London laughing with his *Green Carnation*, among his most highly appreciated shafts were those aimed at Meredith. "The world can no more understand the beauty of sin than it can understand the preface to *The Egoist*." "Mr. Amaranth says he is going to bring out an edition" (of Meredith's works) "'done into English' by himself. It is such a good idea and would help the readers so much." Nor did time tend to lessen Meredith's obscurity or to increase the public's tolerance of it. Stopford Brooke had the assent of a large body of readers when he said, after Meredith's death in 1909, that his works were

spoiled by a native obscurity which he really seemed of late, in his literary life, to cherish and cosset as if it were an excellence. It is easy to be obscure, but there is a certain difficulty in being as obscure as Meredith was, and he liked that difficulty and kept it with him as a king keeps a jester.

Miss May Sinclair in her book *The Helpmate* has shown us an ordinary member of the reading public, Walter Majendie, ship-owner in the northern industrial town of Scale, on whose bookshelves "one Meredith, partly uncut, testified to an honest effort and a baulked accomplishment." On the bookshelves of many middle-class homes like volumes could be found; and not only there. There were readers of outstanding intellect and fine literary

taste who confessed to being in the same case as the Philistine Walter Majendie. Swinburne avowed that he could not get through *Lord Ormont and his Aminta*. "I have never been able to read right through any of his novels," said Wilfrid Blunt. On the other hand there was Frederick Anstey who said, "There are few of his books I have not read many times and always with increased admiration for so great and original a genius"; and Richard Bentley who declared that he had the strongest delight in his works, and bought each book as it came out. Henry Sidgwick has told how he once came across *Emilia in England*, which had such an effect on him that he forthwith spent all his spare cash in buying other of Meredith's works. T. P. O'Connor took *Beauchamp's Career* to read in the train when he was going to an important political meeting, and became so absorbed in the story that he forgot all about the "apparently small and trivial things" on which he had to speak. Grant Allen was captivated by the love and understanding of Nature that he found in the books.

He knows the intimate facts of countryside life as very few of us do after most specific training. He doesn't, perhaps, know much technically about the wild cherry, but as for how he would describe it—well, you've read *Richard Feverel* and *Love in the Valley*.

Thomas Hardy started the 'nineties with a smaller following, even, than George Meredith. His earliest novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and *The Return of the Native*, had delighted a moderately large circle of readers of the 'seventies with their idyllic beauty and freshness. Swinburne revelled in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and J. A. Symonds in *The Return of the Native*. Coventry Patmore was captivated by *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and declared that it ought to have been written in verse. Edward Burne-Jones loved all the early books. Only as the note of doom, heard as a faint undertone in these first novels, deepened and strengthened until it dominated the whole, did readers begin to shiver and almost to cower under its relentless compulsion. It sounded with terrible clearness in *Far From the Madding Crowd*, published in 1874. Mrs. Panton (daughter of Walter Frith, R.A.) describes this book as "bursting upon an astonished world," but this is a somewhat too exuberant statement. It made no great and general sensation. It won for Hardy a considerable number of new readers, it established him as the possessor of rare tragic genius,

and it presented that fatalistic conception of life that was to be so poignantly developed in his later novels. John Freeman says that *The Return of the Native* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* make a perfect harmony, "one clear and sunny, one grave and stormy."

With each succeeding book the gloom deepened, and some of the earlier readers began to fall away. Edward Burne-Jones represented a considerable section when he said that he had given up reading Hardy because his stories ended always in tragic misery. In January 1888 Leslie Stephen wrote to Hardy, "My wife, if I may confess it, likes happy endings, as Darwin did, and found your story (*The Withered Arm*) rather too tragic. I was equally interested and I have more corrupt tastes."

The book which brought Hardy into general notice, and enlarged his public to include nearly every novel reader in the kingdom, was *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, published in 1891. The reviews sounded the note which roused that section of the public that cared very little for art but a great deal for what they considered morality, to feverish action. The *Saturday*, in a review written as Edmund Gosse furiously declared by "an ape-leading and shrivelled spinster," "one of the horrid women who live about the Albany," denounced it as being entirely immoral and unfit for the reading of decent people. The *Quarterly* said that *Tess* told "a coarse and disagreeable story in a coarse and disagreeable manner," and attempted to support its statement by quotations. The author was overwhelmed with letters from indignant parents, protesting against such a book being placed within reach of their innocent daughters; from clergymen, who wrote as they said in the interests of morality; from outraged subscribers to libraries who demanded that it should be withdrawn from circulation. Bishop Talbot, we are told, regarded it with horror because of its pagan fatalism; even Henry James called *Tess* "vile" and said he wondered at "good little Thomas Hardy," though later he acknowledged to Robert Louis Stevenson that although it was "chockful of faults and falsity," it had "a singular beauty and charm."

On the other side were the defenders. Edmund Gosse declared the book "simply magnificent," and quoted Sir Walter Besant and Mrs. Humphry Ward as agreeing with him. The Duchess of Abercorn wrote to Hardy saying that the novel had saved her all further trouble in the assortment of her friends. Her guests, she

said, fought continually over her dinner-table concerning the character of Tess. She put to them one question, "Do you support her?" and the "no's" she struck off from her list of friends. In circles lower than that of her Grace a similar war was waged. Suburbia at its various levels fought over *Tess*. Literary societies found that the book produced a far more animated discussion than did any masterpiece of Meredith's. Only a few readers remained calm enough to give a dispassionate judgment on the book, such as that quoted by Dame Ethel Smyth of her friend, Harry Brewster, "It is partly beautiful and partly utter rubbish."

Four years later Hardy published *Jude the Obscure* and the storm arose again in threefold violence. Nothing like it had been known since the tempest raised by Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*. The Press, almost with one accord, denounced the book as blasphemous and indecent; Havelock Ellis, in the *Savoy*, was its only notable defender. It was reviled as an attack on religion, on the ordinance of marriage, on the sanctities of home life, on the position of women, on the institutions of the country. The Bishop of Wakefield wrote to the papers saying that he had put his copy of *Jude* in the fire; he wrote also to Messrs. W. H. Smith, calling upon them to purge their library of the book. Other letters to the same effect were received by the firm, and the pressure of public opinion was strong enough to cause *Jude* to be withdrawn. "Everyone is jumping on Hardy's last book," wrote Mrs. Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes) to her father. "It is much finer in reality and as a work of literary philosophic value than *Tess*, but the subject is, of course, very painful." It is probably because it was so painful that the denunciation was so loud. It was natural to cry out in indignation when one was being cruelly hurt, natural too, perhaps, to attribute malignity to the inflicter of such suffering. For a later generation *Jude the Obscure* may not possess special poignancy, but those of us who read it in those early days remember how it tore at our hearts. Swinburne wrote to Thomas Hardy, "The tragedy—if I may venture an opinion—is equally terrible and beautiful in its pathos. . . . How cruel you are. . . . How thankful I should be (I know that I may speak for other admirers as cordial as myself) for another admission into an English paradise, *Under the Greenwood Tree*."

There was no response to his appeal. The reception given to *Tess* and *Jude* decided Hardy to write no more novels. He turned

to poetry, and particularly to his great dramatic work, *The Dynasts*; and after the vituperation had died down his books gradually took their place among those classics that are read not because they are new or startling or the fashion, but because the reader loves them and appreciates their high literary worth. The number of these was not large and did not greatly increase, for Hardy's appeal was not to the rising generation. To the young readers of the 'nineties setting out hopefully to make a new world, his message seemed not only terrible but stultifying; for what could enthusiasm, devotion and labour avail if an inexorable Fate guided with its dark hand one's every effort and brought it to futility and ruin? Mr. Maurice Baring has told us that when he and his friend Herbert Cornish were about eighteen they were great devotees of both Hardy and Meredith, and Mrs. Panton declares that when she was in her early twenties she read and re-read *Far From the Madding Crowd* until she knew it by heart. But these were of the minority. There were some readers—old as well as young—who were insensitive enough to regard the books merely as satisfactory "thrillers" and who read of the opening of Fanny Robins's coffin, the setting up of the gallows for poor Tess, and the terrible hanging scene in *Jude* with no other feeling than that of pleasurable excitement. These, however, were not permanent admirers, and fell away when a more facile "thriller" presented itself.

Such works were provided in abundance by the other two novelists who made up the quartette of the 'nineties—Hall Caine and Marie Corelli. These two—unlike Meredith and Hardy—can quite comfortably be classed together. They began their literary careers at about the same time, they appealed to the same type of reader, and they enjoyed the same immense popularity. When the 'nineties opened the circulation of Hall Caine's *Shadow of a Crime*, *The Deemster* and *The Bondman* and of Marie Corelli's *Thelma*, *Ardath* and *The Soul of Lillith* was already enormous and throughout the decade they and the even more popular novels that followed them sold, as Mrs. Atherton puts it, "by the ton." "Why can't I be a Marie Corelli!" sighed Anne Douglas Sedgwick, contemplating the scanty sums brought in by her own novels, and many other authors, doubtless, uttered the same envious cry. None of them, except Hall Caine, even approached her. How it came about it was difficult to explain. The reviews did not help; the really influential papers either ignored the works of the two

popular favourites or were consistently unkind to them. "I was feeling greatly depressed under the wilful, as well as, in some cases, unconscious misrepresentation to which I am being exposed on all sides," wrote Hall Caine to Mrs. Annie Swan (herself a writer of stories that had considerable but not enormous popularity) in reply to a letter she had sent him praising his *Eternal City*. On Miss Corelli the effect of adverse criticism was to enrage rather than to depress. "Whenever I see a *World* or a *Pall Mall Gazette* vulgarly sneering at a work of literature I conclude that it must be good—exceptionally so—and this is generally a correct estimate; it certainly was so concerning *Beatrice*," she wrote to Rider Haggard, when his latest novel, *Beatrice*, had been severely dealt with by several reviewers. After *Barabbas*, published in 1893, Miss Corelli refused to allow copies of her books to be sent out for review, but that, naturally, only gave certain critics a keener joy in their task of enlightening the public as to the real value of her works.

The public, however, refused to be enlightened, and the sales mounted higher and higher. Even as late as 1909 when her popularity was waning, Lord Riddell noted in his diary that he had been told by Robertson Nicoll that his firm had sold 130,000 copies of her latest book, and had offered her £9,500 for the next. It is literally true to say that she was read by some members of all classes, from the monarch on the throne to the beggar in the streets. Queen Victoria praised *The Sorrows of Satan*; her daughter, the Empress Frederick, was greatly interested in *Thelma*; but the royal admirer who was Miss Corelli's pride and boast was the Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VII. He had read and praised all her books; he had asked her to dinner with him at Homburg; he had given her a signed photograph of himself which, framed and glazed, hung in the hall of her house at Stratford-on-Avon; he had said, "My son George is well acquainted with your books." For *Barabbas* his admiration was extreme. He called at Downing Street soon after he had read it, Miss Mary Gladstone says, and was full of its praises. He found Lady Sarah Spencer reading to Mr. Gladstone from a volume of Southey and he insisted that the book should be put aside and *Barabbas* read instead. The old statesman bore it for an hour, and then by way of comment uttered the one word, "Southey."

Yet Gladstone, too, read Miss Corelli's works occasionally. He

called on her one day (so she proudly told Mrs. Desmond Humphreys) to tell her how interested he was in her *Romance of Two Worlds*, and stayed for two hours discussing it. He asked her if she was a spiritualist and where she got her strange ideas of the other world. Learned professors also, if we may trust the evidence of Mr. H. G. Wells in *The New Machiavelli*, sometimes relaxed their minds on her works; historians, like Sidney Low, regarded with affection those of Mr. Hall Caine. Poets, too, were numbered among the readers of these two popular favourites. Tennyson showed great interest in *Ardath*, and T. E. Brown, the Manx poet, read and warmly praised all the books of Hall Caine—though perhaps his enthusiasm was stimulated by the fact that their author, too, was a Manxman.

Out in Samoa Robert Louis Stevenson was finding entertainment in reading *The Bondman*. He liked it at first, but lost interest as he went on. "It gets very wild," he said. It was the wildness that made the book's chief attraction for many readers—especially for boys. E. F. Benson recalls that when he was at school he read the books of both Marie Corelli and Hall Caine, but he liked Hall Caine the best. *The Manxman*, he said, was

A prodigious book, delivered with Sinaitic solemnity and circumstance. It was full of fire and thunderstorms and tempests and trumpets, and I quite understood how it was that if the people on the Isle of Man are like that, the cats have no tails, for anything so flippant as a tail could not possibly exist on the same island as Mr. Hall Caine. . . . It was grand, and I was so taken up with the grandeur that I could never remember what it was about.

Wilkie Collins, although he admired Hall Caine's work, especially *The Deemster*, felt constrained to suggest mildly that the wildness was overdone. "When next you take up your pen," he wrote, "will you consider a little whether your tendency to dwell on what is grotesque and violent in human nature does not need some discipline."

It was not that the wildness meant immorality. Both Mr. Hall Caine and Miss Marie Corelli were strongly, even fiercely moral. They preached loudly and insistently, and they were accepted by a large number of their readers as spiritual guides of high authority. Mr. A. G. Gardiner might cite the acceptance of Hall Caine as a moral teacher as a sign of the decadence of the age;

Bishop Talbot might pronounce *Barabbas* "wild and utterly unhistorical"; Miss Charlotte Yonge (now over seventy, and a more reliable guide with regard to Anglo-Catholic opinion than any bishop) might call *Barabbas* "a horrid book" (though she admitted she had not read it); but these were not the voices that made themselves most loudly heard. An enormous congregation drawn from all parts of London listened to Spurgeon's eloquent tribute to the teaching of *The Sorrows of Satan*; the nobility and fashion of the West End crowded Farm Street Chapel to hear Father Bernard Vaughan deliver himself to the same effect. Father Ignatius was as active in acclaiming Marie Corelli as he had been in denouncing Charles Gore. He preached on *The Sorrows of Satan* at the Portman Rooms, Baker Street, to a densely packed congregation, and he wrote to Miss Corelli hailing her as "a prophet of good things to come in this filthy and materialistic generation." "The utter misery of being without Christ in life and in death, the daring blasphemies of popular poets and other writers, and the consequences in the lives of their readers you have indeed thrillingly portrayed," he said. How far his exhortation "Let all our clergy have a copy of *The Sorrows of Satan* on their library table," was obeyed we cannot tell, but we know that from many less famous pulpits all over the country were heard echoes of these loud-voiced acclamations of Miss Corelli. The Reverend Lancelot Ludovic Soulsby, vicar of that eminently genteel suburban parish of which Mr. G. W. E. Russell tells us, for example, chose *The Master Christian* as the subject of his Christmas sermon.

Yet these readers—the royal personages, the statesmen, the poets, writers, scholars, clergy—did not form the real public of these two novelists. It was not of them that Joseph Conrad was thinking when he wrote "the sort of people who read Marie Corelli and Hall Caine." It was not they who bought the thousands of copies whose sale made less successful writers metaphorically foam at the mouth "when indiscreet persons prattled of Mr. H. Caine and Miss Corelli"—as did Mr. Vachell's Harold Newsome, of *The Other Side*. They read because they were curious, interested, even admiring, but they remained detached and critical. The real public was to be found among those who brought not intelligence, but only sentiment to their reading; who could not distinguish between violence and strength, sensationalism and tragedy. These gave to the books their whole-hearted and unquestioning allegiance.

They were to be found among the half-educated, rich and poor; the simple and unworldly; and the adolescent. Few records of their impressions remain, though in their day they were volatile. It was impossible to escape hearing them. "Nobody," says Mr. Herbert Palmer, "missed *The Sorrows of Satan* or *The Deemster*," and this is almost literally true, for those who did not read the books were forced to meet them day after day—in railway carriages, in restaurants, drawing-rooms, kitchens, offices, factories; and though the Literary Societies for the most part eschewed them, unofficial debates—or perhaps responsive rhapsodies would be a better term—were carried on in all these places. So that when the Reverend F. G. Ellerton, in a letter to John Bailey, after advocating a slaughter of the Minor Poets, added, "and even greater ferociousness might be expended on the Marie Corelli's (if you know the name) of this world," he might seem to be suggesting an impossibility. Sir Edward Parry has told how Miss Corelli once came by chance to a hotel in Caernarvon, and found admirers there in the person of the hotel-keeper who had read all her works, and of a local overseer who showed such intense admiration of the "great writer" that "I thought," says Sir Edward, "he would have kneeled and kissed the hem of her garment." Sir John Squire records a meeting with a Welsh out-of-work mason (in 1902) who, after a conversation that touched on Shakespeare, Ruskin, Keats and Shelley, surprised him by remarking in awestruck tones on the greatness of Marie Corelli, "all innocent that anybody thought of these authors as being on rather different planes." Herbert Palmer, at the age of about eighteen, was "very much excited by Hall Caine and Marie Corelli," and Dame Laura Knight has told how she and her sister, in their impecunious youth, used to save up their money until they could afford to lunch at a certain restaurant which supplied to its patrons the *Windsor Magazine* in which some of Hall Caine's stories were appearing. Sir Hugh Walpole, in *Harmer John*, gives a realistic portrait of two types of Miss Corelli's admirers. There was Miss Leeson, the "nice young thing," flighty and fluffy, assistant at the circulating library of the cathedral town of Polchester, who sucked sugared almonds as she sighed over the Corelli she was investigating; and simple, kindly, shrewd Mrs. Penethen who sat in the fine old kitchen of her house in the same town, absorbed in *Thelma*. She could read it, she declared, if the house were on fire.

Miss Corelli probably reached the height of her fame when, in 1896, she published *The Mighty Atom*. Here, wittingly or unwittingly, she submitted her work to the acid test of comparison with that of Thomas Hardy. Her *Mighty Atom*, although in conception and purpose it was entirely different from *Jude the Obscure*, culminated in a scene which could not but recall the terrible child tragedy of Hardy's book. It recalled it as a clumsy parody might recall the fine original. That it was so regarded and commented on showed that more readers than might have been expected knew something of the works of both writers. Among these it was derided, but the vast public that scarcely knew Hardy's name and adored Marie Corelli received it with the almost reverent enthusiasm that they had accorded to *The Sorrows of Satan*. They wept over the sorrows of the preposterous little hero, eleven-year-old Lionel Valliscourt, and were as vehement as the author herself in their denunciations of those parents who taught their children that "there is no God, and that the First Cause of the Universe was merely an Atom, productive of other atoms, that moved in circles of fortuitous regularity, shaping worlds indifferently, and without any mind force whatever behind the visible matter." *The Mighty Atom* was lauded in a certain section of the Press as almost a new gospel, and the little Devonshire town of Clovelly rose into guide-book fame as "the scene of Miss Corelli's great novel."

Mr. Hall Caine's public probably reached its greatest extent in 1894, with *The Manxman*, and, like Miss Corelli's, for a long time it showed no sign of diminishing. It was entirely unaffected by the scorn that reviewers poured upon it or by the strictures of more fastidious readers. It loved the sentimentalism that made Henry Harland say he would "flee from Marie Corelli as he would from the measles." Its ear was deaf to the defects of style that provoked Father Martindale's comment, "Miss Corelli might—one never knows—have meant to write good English." It would have been indignant, but certainly not convinced, if it had heard Mrs. Robertson Nicoll's criticism of Hall Caine's *The Christian* as "the most disagreeable and depressing novel" she had ever read, or Mr. Raymond Blathwayt's comment on the same work, "What a bad book it was!" And if any of its members read in E. F. Benson's popular novel, *Mammon & Co.*, which came out in 1899, how Kit, the fascinating heroine, declared that she put herself to sleep by enumerating her dislikes—"a long and remarkably varied

list beginning ‘Marie Corelli, parsnips’”—they would have shrugged indignant shoulders and severely observed that a young woman who was certainly no better than she should be was obviously not the person to appreciate the high moral tone of Miss Corelli’s works.

All through the ’nineties this great public remained firm although it was threatened by powerful forces that were at work in the country. Scepticism, realism, feminism, and above all, anti-sentimentalism were arrayed against it, and in the end they—with the help, let us hope, of the spread of education and a rising intelligence—prevailed. The new century saw its massed ranks dispersing, though many members bore away with them the standards those ranks had upheld. There is food for thought in the reflection that the two really great novelists who served this age, Meredith and Hardy, failed to make a mark except on a very restricted circle of their countrymen; while the lesser pair, Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, although their names do not appear in the pages of English literary history, influenced English taste, possibly also English character, throughout the great mass of English readers, strongly and with permanent effects. They immensely strengthened the taste for a literature superficial, flashy and untrue, yet presenting itself as the exponent of high moral ideals. By their shouting and their clamour they tended to destroy the sensitiveness of the public ear—never too acute—to the finer notes that can be struck by the masters of language; and they enforced the lesson that the reader’s part was simply to listen and be thrilled without making any effort to understand. Yet it would be unfair to say that the work they did was entirely unfortunate in its tendency. They gave a vast amount of pleasure to a large number of people, many of them people whose sources of pleasure were few; and those of their readers who possessed common sense, balance, and simplicity of mind may have extracted from their inflated sentiments some thoughts worth keeping.

One other type of novel must be noticed before we leave the novels of the ’nineties—the type associated with the circle known as “the Souls.” This circle included among others A. J. Balfour, Lord Curzon, George Wyndham, Alfred Lyttelton, Lord Pembroke, Miss Margot Tennant and her sister Lady Ribblesdale, Lady Granby and Lady Elcho. These names are sufficient to indicate the brilliance with which the circle shone, and there are

many tributes to its influence on the social and intellectual life of the day. Mrs. Dugdale, niece and biographer of A. J. Balfour, says:—

The nineties were the years when the formality of the Victorian period was being irradiated by an ease, a gaiety, an intelligent exclusiveness, largely due, as far as London society was concerned, to the influence of the particular group that has come to be known as the Souls.

Miss Margot Tennant (now Countess of Oxford and Asquith), writing as one of its members, says:—

What interests me most on looking back now at those ten years is the loyalty, devotion and fidelity which we showed to one another, and the pleasure we derived from friendships that could not have survived a week had they been accompanied by gossip, mocking or any personal pettiness.

Lord Haldane, looking on critically, not from inside the circle but from a place near its circumference, was of the opinion that

They sometimes took themselves much too seriously, and on the whole it is doubtful whether their influence was on balance good. But they cared for literature and art, and their social gifts were so high that people sought much to be admitted into their circle.

Mr. H. G. Wells, regarding them from a distance, with the detachment of a social historian, pronounces that

An exceptional wave of intellectual enterprise had affected the British governing class. Under the influence of such brilliant Tories as Arthur Balfour and George Wyndham a number of people in society were taking notice of writing and were on the alert for any signs of literary freshness.

In the face of these tributes it is difficult to see how E. F. Benson's *Dodo*, published in 1893, could have been accepted—as it was—as describing, even in caricature, this unique and highly intelligent society group. The book was read with much amusement in the circles where the originals of its characters were personally known, and was seized upon by the general public as giving an intimate picture of life as it was lived in the higher ranks

of society. Those who held to the Victorian ideal of society as an association characterized by dignity and a fine reticence found the book distasteful. Lady Ponsonby, we are told, considered that Mr. Benson had betrayed his order. Dodo, the heroine, was generally accepted as standing for Miss Margot Tennant. Dodo was, says Miss (now Dame) Ethel Smyth, who herself figured in the book as Edith Staines, a musical genius, "a fantasia on Margot Tennant."

Miss Tennant strongly resented the travesty of herself given in *Dodo*. The author denied that his heroine stood for any particular person, but, says Miss Tennant, "his brother, Arthur Benson, and Randall Davidson came to see me to express their regret at what had occurred, and my enemies embarrassed me and amused themselves by calling me Miss Dodo. I told everyone I could not have been the heroine as I was not beautiful and did not hunt in summer."

With *Dodo* a new type of heroine was established. She differed widely from the accepted Victorian ideal, sweet, retiring, beautiful in character as in outward form, but without any pretension to wit or daring. She was a vivacious, entirely selfish, a-moral young lady, and was represented as possessing in a high degree the rare gift of charm. Lady Asquith calls Dodo "a pretentious donkey with the heart and brains of a linnet." Certainly her conversation, supposed to be chief among her attractions, shows little sign of intelligence or sensibility. She rattles on incessantly without real wit, but with a lively fancy that sometimes gives the illusion of wit. She makes fun of everything. She is, she declares, incapable of being serious. "I daresay it would be very nice to be serious, just as I'm sure it would be very nice to live at the bottom of the sea and pull the fishes' tails, but it isn't possible." We are told very little of this young lady's literary tastes, but, as far as our information goes, they would appear to disqualify her from holding any position in the widely-read, intellectual circle of the Souls. She had a collection of "flaring novels," and thought Harrison Ainsworth's stories "rot." She had read at least some of the works of Browning and Tennyson, but apparently only to make fun of them:—

One's got no business to be bored, and it's one's own fault, as a rule, if one is. For instance, that woman in the moated Grange ought to have swept away the blue fly that buzzed in the pane,

and set a mousetrap for the mouse that shrieked, and got a carpenter to repair the mouldering wainscot, and written to the Psychical Research, how she had heard her own sad name in corners cried, and it couldn't have been the cat or she would have caught the shrieking mouse. Oh, there were a hundred things she might have done before she sat down and said, "He cometh not."

Two years before the publication of *Dodo*, the *Spectator* had said of Anthony Hope's novel, *Father Stafford*, "It is carried on in a great measure by means of clever, cynical, usually disjointed and sometimes epigrammatic conversation, or, often more accurately, slang, in the exercise of which the various persons of the story show equal ease and fluency." This is obviously the style of conversation at which the new type of heroine aimed, and Mr. Hope brought it to perfection in his *Dolly Dialogues* which appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1893, and were later published in book form. Miss Dolly Foster was a more subtly conceived and less flamboyant Dodo. The *Dialogues* were almost as popular as the author's very different work, *The Prisoner of Zenda*. George Meredith approved them; Lord Rosebery was much interested in their heroine. There followed many novels in which the type reappeared, some of the most successful being those by Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, whose *Concerning Isabel Carnaby* made something of a sensation in 1898. Her heroines chatter in the same lively fashion as *Dodo*, but their intelligence is on a higher level and their hearts are distinctly warmer. Nancy Burton, of *Fuel of Fire*, tells how, since her engagement, the prospect of becoming an old-fashioned, adoring wife has grown attractive to her:—

You can't think how funny it is to watch oneself growing early Victorian. I feel like a motor-car that is gradually developing into a mahogany sideboard; or an embroidered art-needlework portière that is slowly evolving into a pair of rep curtains. . . . It is really divine; and the more modern one has been, the more exquisite is the tumbling back again—on the same principle as a toboggan slide or a switchback railway, don't you know.

These vivacious young ladies, though they charmed a large circle of readers, were by no means generally accepted as an actual or desirable type of English girl. Miss Edna Lyall, writing in 1897, compared them with Molly Gibson, the heroine of Mrs. Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. "Molly," she said, "with her loyal heart

and sweet sunshiny nature will, we venture to think, better represent the majority of English girls than the happily abnormal Dodos and Millicent Chynes of present-day fashion." The type, however, persisted; and it developed into that unpleasant personage, the "smart" heroine of the Edwardian era.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW JOURNALISM

IT was on a morning in April, in the year 1885, that a middle-aged, book-loving City gentleman whom we will call Mr. Smith first became aware that a literary epidemic was raging round about him. He lived in what was then one of the outermost suburbs of London, and he left his home on that bright spring morning spruce, well dressed and alert as usual, his *Times* in his hand. Entering the omnibus that was to take him to the nearest railway station he noticed that several of its occupants were reading a type of paper which he did not remember to have seen before. It was not a newspaper, a magazine, rather, with flimsy, closely printed pages and a green cover. The readers all seemed very interested, and Mr. Smith was induced to bend his head at a somewhat uncomfortable angle in order that he might make out the title, in large print, on the cover of the copy held in the work-roughened hands of the young man who sat opposite to him. *Tit-Bits.* Curious! Tit-Bits of what? Could it be a cookery journal? Three out the four readers he had counted were men, so that seemed unlikely. Mr. Smith gave it up and opened his *Times*.

In the second-class railway carriage in which he continued his journey most of the occupants were reading newspapers with which he was familiar, but on the knees of one of them lay a copy of the green journal. Mr. Smith was able to read the words which, in smaller print, followed the title, "from all the most interesting books, periodicals and newspapers throughout the world." For a moment he was startled, the undertaking seemed such a large one. The idea was good, but nothing very satisfying could be served as a tit-bit, and a succession of such morsels would surely be harmful to the mental digestion. Much, of course, depended on the character of the morsels, and of this Mr. Smith soon had some means of judging. At the next station a young lady, pretty and dressed with business-like neatness, got in and took the empty seat next his, then drew from her bag a copy of *Tit-Bits*, and proceeded to read it with every appearance of interest. Glancing at the page Mr. Smith saw that it contained a number of short paragraphs, and he managed to read some of the headings. "Curiosities of the

Post Office," "The Incomes of Archbishops," "Some Curious Butterflies," "The Inventor of the Tricycle." *Tit-bits* indeed! Mr. Smith felt concerned for the young lady. She had turned the page and was beginning on another assortment. Such a surfeit of miscellaneous information would surely have disastrous consequences. And next week there would be another number. Mr. Smith shook his head.

Walking from the station to his office—he met on the way two more *Tit-Bits*, one carried by a schoolboy, another by a charwoman returning from her early job of cleaning business premises—Mr. Smith's mind was still occupied by speculations concerning the new paper. Had this epidemic broken out that morning, or had the green eruption been visible to all the world while he had failed to notice it? He was, he knew, a little absent-minded, but surely this phenomenon would not have escaped him. However, he forgot about *Tit-Bits* as the day's work went on, and it was not until five o'clock was drawing near and he was giving some letters to the office-boy to post that the ubiquitous paper was brought again to his notice. "That one is for New York," he said, "see that you put it in the right box." "Yes, sir," said the boy, and added in a lower tone as if irresistibly impelled to impart a valuable piece of information, "if you was to put all the streets of London end to end they'd just reach over to New York, sir." "Heavens!" said Mr. Smith, "and how do you know that?" "Read it in *Tit-Bits*, sir," answered the boy. "And do you know," asked his master, "when this letter that you post to-night will be delivered in New York?" The boy looked blank. *Tit-Bits* did not deal with ordinary unpictorial facts such as this. "That," said Mr. Smith, "would be far more useful for you to know. I should advise you to get a book on commercial geography and give *Tit-Bits* a rest."

On his way home Mr. Smith bought a copy of *Tit-Bits* at the station bookstall. He put it down in the hall with his hat and *Times* and coming in a little later after his usual tour of the garden found his wife reading it. "So this is *Tit-Bits*," she said, "I've heard a lot about it. It seems a funny sort of paper with a jumble of all sorts of things that nobody wants to know. Who reads it?" "It is read, my dear," said Mr. Smith, "by those people who prefer potted meats to good beef and pudding, but since I am not one of the number let us go to our dinner."

Mr. Smith thought a good deal about *Tit-Bits* that evening, and next day asked a friend who was on the staff of a daily paper how long the public had been taking its literary nourishment in this particular form. The friend told him that the first number had been published in Manchester in 1881, that it had been transferred to London two years later, but had only recently become widely popular, and that largely through lavish and sensational advertising. "Surely," he said, "you have heard of the seven-roomed house—*Tit-Bits Villa*—that was given as a prize for the best short story sent in by a reader of the paper?" Mr. Smith remembered vaguely that he had heard something of such a prize, but he had not connected it with books or reading. Such advertising methods applied to literature seemed to him unnatural and monstrous. There was no doubt, however, that they were successful. The public bought *Tit-Bits* and what was more read it and was interested in it. This seemed to Mr. Smith a phenomenon worth investigating, and he took to looking out for copies in his daily journeys, and making mental notes upon the readers. Large numbers of these were young people, whom he classified as office-boys, shop-girls, clerks, typists and factory hands, and he reflected that these would have been among the first to benefit by the Education Act of 1870. That brought him to the realization that an immense new class of readers, which would increase year by year, had been created, readers who had very little literary judgment and were ready to accept anything that was judiciously forced upon their notice, provided that it did not require any uncomfortable activity of brain. He felt that he could not sufficiently admire the astuteness of those persons who had, in the very nick of time, provided exactly the literature that would suit this new public, and had induced them to sample it by an ingenious system of competitions and bribes.

A good many older people, too, Mr. Smith noticed, read *Tit-Bits*, but not often with the absorbed attention that was given to it by the younger ones. Middle-aged gentlemen glanced through it, remarked on a paragraph here and there, and left it on the seat of train or tram when they got out, whence it was promptly retrieved by porter or conductor. Matrons out on shopping expeditions smiled a little over its pages, then folded it neatly and put it in their bags, reserving it probably for Eliza in the kitchen at home. The older working-class men and women seldom read *Tit-Bits* or

indeed any paper at all. Reading was for them not a pastime but a labour.

At home Mr. Smith found that *Tit-Bits* still followed him. There was nearly always a copy in the kitchen when he came in that way after his labours in the garden on long summer evenings, and often the two maids would be sitting at the table, the copy spread between them, giggling delightedly as he had seen the boys and girls do in his morning omnibus. Several times Mr. Smith bought a number and studied it carefully, but although he now and then found an interesting piece of information or a good joke he kept to his first opinion that its "snippets" provided unwholesome fare. From his two schoolboy sons he gained further information concerning the paper. They, it appeared, were fairly regular readers, expending occasional pennies upon numbers which they put into circulation among their schoolfellows, and benefiting by the purchases of others who did the same. Mr. Smith was assailed by jokes at which he was expected to laugh, and occasionally did, and by conundrums which he was not expected to answer, and invariably did not. "Who is said to have been detained on Mt. Ida by the nails in his boots?" "How many pennies must be placed in a pile to reach the height of St. Paul's Cathedral?" "How many Bank of England notes would weigh one ounce?" "What bird is said to hatch her eggs by gazing on them?" Mr. Smith was distressed to think that his sons were growing up under this snippet dispensation. He could not believe that minds cluttered with such a jumble of unrelated facts could function freely and effectively. He found, however, that the answers to most of the conundrums were forgotten in a few weeks; and that gave him some comfort.

The weeks and the months went on and Mr. Smith grew accustomed to the green eruption though he did not lose his interest in it. Then one June evening, more than three years after that interest had been first aroused, he was greeted as he came into the house by his son. "I say, Dad, you can't guess this one. Mother couldn't. What eminent personage is called by his friends Tum-tum, and why?" Mr. Smith, as usual, gave it up." You got that out of *Tit-Bits*, I suppose," he said. "Wrong," said the boy, "it came from *Answers*, a new paper out this week. Lots of the fellows at school have got it, and the answer to the one I asked you is the Prince of Wales, because he's so jolly fat," and he exploded with laughter. Mr. Smith looked pained. "Extremely vulgar," he said,

"this new paper must be worse than *Tit-Bits*." "It was not put quite like that," explained his son; "it says 'because of the graceful rotundity of his person.' And it's rather a jolly paper."

Mr. Smith remained unappeased. To his strict Victorian notions the joke appeared disloyal as well as vulgar. It gave him a prejudice against the new weekly, and when next morning he noticed a sprinkling of its orange covers among the green he felt that England was definitely going downhill. He took an early opportunity of examining a copy of *Answers*. With the exception of the paragraph his son had quoted he found nothing that could be condemned as actually vulgar; for the rest the contents seemed to him as vapid, inconsequent and uninspiring as those of its predecessor. There were paragraphs on Ancient London, Silk Stockings, How to Live on Nothing a Year, Elwes the Miser, Vails to Servants, Forests Under the Sea—all written in the easy, catchy style that not only failed to stimulate but actually deadened thought.

Day by day the number of orange covers increased though the green persisted also, for, as Mr. Smith reflected, the public for such literature was larger by many thousands than it had been three years before. Yet, as it appeared, neither Mr. George Newnes of *Tit-Bits* nor Mr. Alfred Harmsworth of *Answers* was satisfied but continued to devise new and astounding methods for increasing their circulation. *Tit-Bits* announced that it had caused tubes of sovereigns to be buried in the earth, the clues to their location being given in the current number of the paper; and forthwith thousands of eager readers, with the green-covered talisman in their pockets, set out for these new gold fields. *Answers* offered a prize of a pound a week for life to the reader who should make the nearest guess (coupon to be enclosed) as to the amount of bullion in the Bank of England at a certain date; and before young and old rose visions of vast cellars filled with glittering heaps, the coins in which they spent their days and nights trying to number.

It was all very exciting and entertaining, but what, thought Mr. Smith, had it to do with literature? However, the public seemed highly delighted, and week by week devoured ever increasing numbers of the green and the orange. The astute purveyors judged that the time had come for a further provision of fare that would satisfy the growing appetite. New publications came in a spate. In 1890 appeared *Comic Cuts* an illustrated paper that caused

uproarious mirth on the part of the less fastidious type of schoolboy of all classes. It was far less wholesome than the old "penny dreadfuls," having none of the inspiring quality which H. G. Wells, among others, claims for that much abused type of periodical. Then came *Forget-Me-Not*, "the paper for the Engaged Girl," which gave expert advice on the choice of rings and the choice of houses; on how to behave when asked to name the day and how to cut out the wedding gown; on the proper treatment of in-laws, and the etiquette of distributing the wedding-cake. Mr. Smith found much quiet enjoyment in watching the faces of attractive young girls who were reading this publication, and in speculating as to which piece of advice was receiving their absorbed attention. There followed *Home Chat* and *Home Notes* which instructed housewives in the art of making their homes a paradise with orange-boxes, cotton-reels, art muslin and white enamel, and how to serve up an elegant four-course dinner at the cost of two and sixpence; the *Sunday Companion* which combined all these features and added a mild religious flavour; and a crowd of others whose names even cannot be given here since they numbered more than a hundred.

All these magazines included serial stories in which charming young typists became the successful rivals of duchesses, and sweet and simple country maidens emerged from their obscure homes to take London by storm as society beauties, actresses, singers or novelists. Every story had a "strong love interest" and a "human appeal." They were mildly interesting and quite harmless except in so far as their entire divorce from reality inclined their readers to believe in a world that never existed. Miss Berta Ruck, who wrote many of these stories, has told us of the enthusiastic letters she received from dozens of delighted readers. One girl said that she "always laid a piece of paper over the lines of the instalment, drawing it down slowly, slowly, so as to make it last out." An old lady wrote to say she had by some accident missed buying her *Sunday Companion*, "and they are so awkward in our shop, and I can't get one, and so I thought I would ask you to kindly copy out that piece and would be much obliged." Mr. Hugh Walpole shows us pretty Maude Penethen sitting by the fire in the fine old kitchen of her mother's house at Polchester reading the serial in the *Golden Penny*; it was called *A Princess of Vascoy* and was most exciting, with enchanting pictures. It was in the *Golden*

Penny that Arnold Bennett's *Grand Babylon Hotel* first appeared in 1901 when the detective story fever was reaching its height.

Mr. Smith watched the progress of this stream of papers with mounting interest and astonishment. At first he attempted to keep up with the output, but the women's papers baffled him and he became a mere onlooker. When in July 1890 *Pearson's Weekly* joined the company proclaiming that its aim was "To Interest, to Elevate, to Amuse" and "to impart a higher tone than at present exists in the class of literature to which it belongs, without in any way detracting from its interesting and amusing features," he tried again. He bought several numbers and read them hopefully, but decided that, apart from its red cover and its larger size, there was little to distinguish the new paper from its green and its orange contemporaries. It was, if anything, even more blatant in its methods of advertisement. Its announcement of a prize of ten pounds to be given to "the reader who first informs us that he is the happy father of twins" really shocked Mr. Smith, and when, during an epidemic of influenza, in 1891, the current number appeared with its pages imbued with eucalyptus, it seemed to him that the confusion between journalism and commercialism was complete.

The sales went gaily on; green and orange and red all had their thousands of readers, and at length a new idea occurred to one of the clever protagonists responsible for that vast output. Why not a daily newspaper? And so, in 1896, the *Daily Mail* came into being. Six times a week the great public put down its halfpennies and carried off its copies. The *Daily Mail* was not a great newspaper. It kept exactly on the level of *Answers* and *Forget-Me-Not*, for its proprietor knew better than to risk any change in the nature of the appeal he had so successfully made to his huge public. Lord Salisbury called it "a paper written by office-boys for office-boys," and it is certain that office-boys read it with zest. But many other people read it too. Mr. Smith was surprised and disgusted to see numbers of really intelligent-looking business men poring over its pages. It was so easy to read, he heard one of them say, you saw all the news at a glance; and as time went on he got used to hearing its raucous pronouncements quoted as authoritative by readers who would not take the little extra trouble involved in seeking their information at more reliable sources.

Mr. Smith was even more surprised and disgusted to find that his own sons and daughters—grown up now, as they considered

—insisted on the *Daily Mail* being delivered at the house. They “adored” it, they said, in the exaggerated language for which he frequently reproved them, although he could not see that they took much interest in its news or its views, except to laugh at some of its more flaring headlines. What they really seemed to want was the serial story; and the reading aloud of the current instalment, with appropriate expression and gesture, became a recognized part of the evening’s programme. The family and any visitors who happened to be present seemed to enjoy it immensely. Mr. Smith himself, although he affected to frown upon the entire proceeding, was really highly entertained, and quite often found himself joining in the shouts of laughter or the deep groans that greeted any particularly telling passage. These stories were as highly moral and as consistently unnatural as were those of *Forget-Me-Not* and *Home Chat*, though perhaps more sensational. Miss Eleanor Farjeon has told us that her father wrote the first one, which he called *Miriam Rozella*. Its theme, a rather daring one for him, was, she says,

of a pure girl flung by desperate circumstances into an equivocal position in a roué’s household. It wouldn’t seem daring now, but it created a stir in the paper, and brought in shoals of letters. As to his mode of writing, it was the mode of the time to write with a reticence we have almost forgotten about, and even Papa was not reticent enough for the *Daily Mail*. “Damn!” exclaimed Randolph in Papa’s typescript. “Bother!” was what Papa found Randolph ejaculating in print. “Confound them!” cried Papa in plain English.

Mr. Smith did not hear *Miriam Rozella*, but he remembered for a long time one story which was about a millionaire who travelled with amazing swiftness in a great white car, and who wooed the lady of his love with princely gifts such as a rope of emeralds, each as big as a pigeon’s egg; and another where the hero was beset by enemies who constantly, by devilish strategy, attempted to take his life, and were as constantly thwarted by the heroine who, in the guise of a nurse, performed feats that the strongest man might have envied, such as holding up for some moments a massive, oak-panelled wall which was about to collapse on the bed where the hero lay helpless. Each of these performances was explained by the fact that the young woman’s “splendid vitality asserted—or

reasserted itself"—a sentence which invariably called forth yells of laughter from the audience. So popular was this reading that when evening engagements prevented it being held, strict orders were given that the day's issue should be kept, and loud were the reproaches if, on the next occasion, it was not forthcoming. Mr. Smith found himself sympathizing heartily with one of his clerks whom he heard enquiring, with a worried look, "Has anyone seen my *Daily Mail*? I don't know what my wife will say if I go home without it. She's reading the serial story. Besides there's the insurance coupon in case there's an accident on the way home." He rejoiced when the paper was found in the possession of the porter, who had been surreptitiously reading the article which told England that if she did not wish to become a nation of degenerates her people must eat wholemeal bread; and he took his way homewards pondering on the elements that went to building up the circulation of a halfpenny paper; not the reliability of its news nor the wisdom of its comments, but its "stunts," the size of its bribes, and its serial story.

In 1906 Mr. Alfred Harmsworth was raised to the peerage. Mr. Smith was a good Tory, but it seemed to him that in this instance his leaders had done ill. "I do like the collars and boots of the Conservatives far best," said Anne Douglas Sedgwick, "yet they *did* make Harmsworth a peer." Mr. Smith, though he would have expressed himself less flippantly, felt, as she did, that the party was discredited by its action. He enjoyed the suggestion for the new peer's title that was made by T. W. H. Crosland—Lord Helpus. "For," said Mr. Crosland, "if ever there was a man who, judged by his public acts, had need for a little of the grace of God, it is Alfred Harmsworth. This we say seriously and reverently."

Before this time Mr. Smith had retired from business and had gone to live in a country house in Devonshire. There he pursued his investigations into the periodical literature of the day in leisurely fashion, as opportunity occurred. He found that the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* (started in 1900), *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *Forget-Me-Not* and the rest arrived in the surrounding villages with the same regularity as they had done in London, if somewhat later. They were on the bookstall of the nearest railway station and in the public reading-room. He found them at the village barber's when he went to get his hair cut, and in the waiting-room of the dentist when an interview with that gentleman became a

painful necessity. He saw them in the hands of women at their cottage doors and of the maids in his own kitchen. Copies were left by tourists at the fine old village inn, and were snatched up by servants and passed from hand to hand until they were worn out. On the whole, as Mr. Smith sadly reflected, his investigations seemed to show that in town and country alike the main result of the Education Act of 1870 had been to enable the people to read the productions of the Harmsworth Press and its rivals.

When he turned from the evidence of real life to the evidence of books he found it equally revealing. Mr. Smith grew very interested in this line of investigation, and carefully noted down any references to the Harmsworth type of literature that he met with in the contemporary memoirs and novels that formed the lighter reading of his studious retirement. He treasured the story of Samuel Butler's servant, the famous Alfred, who accompanied his master in climbing the Rigi:—

When Butler had finished pointing out the beauties of nature from the top of the Rigi, he replied, “Yes, sir, and thank you for telling me about it. And now, if you please, sir, I should like to lie down on the grass here and have a read of *Tit-Bits*. ”

He was a little puzzled at what seemed to him the lamentable lapse of those two great men, Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris, as revealed by Mr. Graham Robertson:—

I used to reflect how lofty and permeated with beauty must be the conversation of the painter and the poet at this weekly symposium, until I discovered that they usually read aloud to each other from a comic paper called *Ally Sloper*.

Mr. Smith was prepared to vouch for the truth of the account given by Miss Corelli in *The Mighty Atom* (which he read because he found a somewhat timeworn copy in the village shop labelled “Of Local Interest”) of the girl who spoilt the cream by letting it boil while she read a penny novelette. He himself had witnessed several similar tragedies, and he sympathized with the incensed aunt who (according to Miss Corelli) declared that “such a muck o' lies was printed in that there book as was enough to bring the judgment of the Almighty on the jackass as wrote it.” Yet he wished to be quite fair in his investigations and when he found any evidence of good resulting from the reading of this literature,

he gave it due weight. He read, for example, in John Masefield's *Multitude and Solitude*, how Roger Naldrett, a young playwright, picked up in a garden in Ireland "a double page from a year-old London paper entitled *Top Knots*." (Mr. Smith read it as *Tit Bits*.)

It consisted of scraps of gossip, scraps of news, scraps of information, seasoned with imperial feeling. It had been edited by someone with a sense of the purity of the home. It was harmless stuff. . . . The jokes were feeble. The paper catered for a class of poor, half-educated people without more leisure than the morning ride to business, and the hour of exhaustion between supper and bed. It was well enough in its way. Some day, when life is less exhausting, men will demand stuff with more life.

Yet, on this page, next to a joke concerning a mother-in-law, came a short paragraph that caught the reader's eye. It was about sleeping sickness, its cause and its effects, and, superficial as it was, it started a train of thought which was to alter the whole course of Roger Naldrett's life. Mr. Smith registered a mark on the credit side of the new journalism; and he was inclined to register another when, in W. B. Maxwell's *Devil's Garden*, he came across a passage in which a man of arrogant temper but strong desire for popularity said to his wife:—

I was reading an article in *Answers* last week, and it seemed as if it had been written specially to enlighten me. It was about sympathy. The author, who didn't sign his name, but was ev'dently a man of powerful int'lect said that without understanding you can't sympathize; and he went on to show that without sympathy the whole world would come to a standstill.

The admiring wife replied, "That's the sort of difficult reading you like. It's too deep for me."

Mr. Smith found this passage illuminating. It showed a public bending respectfully before the new journalism, and accepting its admirable platitudes as the pronouncement of an oracle. No wonder, he thought, that W. E. Henley had warned Mr. Lewis Hind, "Don't write too much for *Tit-Bits*. It's demoralizing."

Mr. Smith, like the good Victorian he was, never neglected his *Punch*. He was pleased to find that the little humpbacked gentleman was, like himself, interested in the new journalism, and from time to time made his genial comments upon it. Mr. Smith specially enjoyed an article called "The Tit-Bitian Statistician,"

and would gleefully quote from it such choice examples as: "A month's accumulation of the mustard wasted daily in London on the edges of plates would suffice to give St. Paul's a beautiful coat of primrose paint"; and "The amount of blotting paper that could be turned out by British paper mills, working two shifts a week during twenty-five years, eight months, three weeks, would be enough to soak up the Pacific."

But of all the books he read, Mr. Smith gained most insight into the subject of his research from *Mr. Fleight*, by Ford Madox Hueffer. It told him about the gentleman who, in the course of an after-dinner speech, pulled *Tit-Bits* out of his pocket and read three jokes from it to the company; and it told him about the *Halfpenny Weekly* which was "a magnificent periodical, a thorough type of the civilization of to-day," having an immense circulation, and bringing in to its proprietors more than fifteen thousand pounds a year. The book let Mr. Smith into all sorts of secrets concerning the production of this *Halfpenny Weekly*. It was to be "written by women for women"; and it was read, Mr. Smith gathered, by suburban policemen, A.B.C. girls, and the inhabitants of shabby back streets such as the Augusta Mews in Westminster. It contained short, snappy paragraphs about social events in high life and the Paris fashions. It had portraits of all the celebrities and articles signed by duchesses. Mr. Smith could not help wondering whether Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer had the *Daily Mirror* in his mind when he wrote of the *Halfpenny Weekly*. True, there were obvious discrepancies. The *Daily Mirror* had been started in 1903 as a women's paper, but having apparently failed to commend itself to the female population it had been rapidly and with striking success transformed into a picture paper. In its new form it was read largely by women, and the original instructions given by its proprietor still held good. They were so exactly what Miss Augusta Macphail, who edited the *Halfpenny Weekly*, might have given to her staff that Mr. Smith felt the likeness could not be mere coincidence.

You must make the *Mirror* suggest that it is produced for people in Society; for those who first adopt new fashions; for those who have leisure and large means. Nine women out of ten would rather read about an evening dress costing a great deal of money —the sort of dress they will never in their lives have a chance of wearing—than about a simple frock such as they could afford. A

recipe for a dish requiring a pint of cream, a dozen eggs, and the breasts of three chickens pleases them better than being told how to make Irish stew.

Even more interesting to Mr. Smith than the story of the *Halfpenny Weekly* was the story told in *Mr. Fleight* of Gilda Leroy, who was in charge of the tobacco stall on the up platform of the High Street, Kensington, Underground Station. He had many times bought cigarettes from her sisters in the business, and had watched these young ladies turn with haughty resignation from the journal in which they had been engrossed to attend to his meek request; and he had wondered what they were reading with such obvious enjoyment. Now Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer told him. They were reading penny novelettes. Mr. Smith felt it a high privilege to be allowed to accompany Miss Gilda Leroy home and become more closely acquainted with her favourite literature. She took the 9.3 train to Victoria and then walked through the shabby streets that shelter between the opposing towers of the Abbey and the Cathedral to her mother's dingy little general shop. She sat down to her supper in the back parlour, at a table spread with a blue and red duster on which was placed a thin piece of cold beef, a jar of extremely yellow pickles and a large cottage loaf. Then she lit a candle and took out her novelette. It was about a governess with opalescent eyes and her lover, a belted earl. Gilda read on breathlessly until she came to the place where the governess's opalescent eyes became transfused with a grey light, and the belted earl said, "Ha, by Jove! Will you place my coronet upon your brows?" Then Mrs. Leroy came in and there was no more reading, but for the rest of that evening and all the next day Gilda went about wearing, in imagination, a robe of white satin and feeling upon her brows the weight of a duchess's tiara, made of enormous pearls. Mr. Smith read all through her raptures with unfailing interest and when Gilda fell in love with a millionaire (thinly disguised) and declared to her mother (who urged precautionary measures) that she intended to behave "as the ladies do in my books. They're all kind and tender and high-minded, and in the sort of situation I'm in do you suppose that any of those ladies would have spied upon him?" he considered whether this was not another instance of a good influence being exerted by these books. He decided against them, however, when Gilda, her passion being unrequited, committed suicide upon the millionaire's door-

step, and henceforward he felt a little uncomfortable whenever he saw a penny novelette in the hands of a young girl.

Mr. Smith's family and friends regarded his preoccupation with the literature which they lightly dismissed as "trash" with great amusement. They joked about it, and brought to him with mock gravity such scraps of information as they could collect. Mr. Smith accepted these with gratitude, and went on his way unperturbed. He attempted no justification of his pursuit, except that at times he would take from his bookshelf his copy of G. K. Chesterton's *All Things Considered* and read aloud to the mockers this passage:—

If you really want to know what is going to happen to the future of our democracy . . . study the pages of *Snaps* or *Patchy Bits*, as if they were the dark tables graven with the oracles of the gods. For, mean and gross as they are, in all seriousness, they contain what is entirely absent from all Utopias and all the sociological conjectures of our time: they contain some hint of the actual habits and manifest desires of the English people. If we are really to find out what the democracy will ultimately do with itself, we shall surely find it, not in the literature that studies the people, but in the literature which the people studies.

THE EDWARDIANS

THE beginning of the new century brought the death of the Queen and the accession of Edward VII. The break with Victorianism, by no means yet complete, extended rapidly. Fresh influences were brought to bear upon the national life. There was a general quickening of the pace, a feeling of expectancy, a gay confidence in the future. It might well have been predicted that the immense activity in literary experiment that had marked the 'nineties would, under these influences, become a stream of creative energy, and that England would, as she had done in the great ages of the past, produce with joyous ease immortal works for the delight of a nation of eager, receptive readers.

Nothing of the kind happened. No giants emerged. There was, indeed, a moderate flow of creative energy, but it was distributed among many claimants and no one of these received such a share as would entitle him to a place among the immortals. The impulse of the 'nineties had waned disappointingly. Some of its most promising literary activities were languishing or had already faded out. The death of the aesthetic movement had preceded that of the century. The new poets it was felt had had their day. Francis Thompson, in ill-health and retirement, was adding little to the early verse which, though its quality was acknowledged, was not sufficient in quantity to give him rank as a great poet. *Lux Mundi* was almost forgotten, and no subsequent religious work that had aroused public interest had appeared. The Feminists could show nothing higher than slightly hysterical propaganda works such as the novels of Sarah Grand. Only the Empire writers could produce a candidate for the highest honours in the person of Rudyard Kipling, and even his claim was disputed. Meredith and Hardy were definitely of a previous generation and not subject to the new influences.

Yet the 'nineties had been by no means an ineffectual period in the history of our literature; their influence was even more marked, perhaps, on readers than on writers. They had broken up that underlying uniformity of taste that, towards the end of the Victorian age, had been tending to solidify. They had freed readers

from what are now known as inhibitions. They had set up new standards, and if many of these had been thrown down and some had even been trampled on, that had only served to demonstrate more fully the possibility of change. Readers were now prepared for almost anything that could be offered to them. There was little chance that any book would shock the subjects of King Edward in the same way as the *Origin of Species* and Ouida's novels had shocked Victorian England. The public had grown used to being shocked, and had come to regard the process as an ordinary literary operation. A succession of shocks had tended to deaden its receptive surface so that the quick, responsive delight of the Victorians in their great authors was felt no more. Enthusiasm was becoming unfashionable.

The literature offered to the Edwardians, though much of it was trashy and ephemeral, contained much that was extremely good of its kind. If there was little genius among the writers of the day there was abundance of cleverness; and this cleverness was, for the most part, exercised in the writing of novels. The novel was rapidly becoming the most characteristic and the most popular form of literary art. It had been popular in the days of the Victorians, but then it had its rivals in poetry, in sermons, in works on religion and science. With the Edwardians it was almost supreme; next to it, but a long way behind, came the light essay. It was used as a means of making public ideas that in earlier times would have been set forward in a serious treatise. We have seen how the Modernists, the Feminists and the Empire builders relied on it for the advancement of their various causes. Later it was made to serve in advocating the particular views of the writer or the small group to which he was attached.

Whatever its subject, there were two qualities that were looked for in every Edwardian work. The first was realism. Life must be shown as it actually was, with no detail however trivial or sordid or ugly omitted. There must be no Victorian fastidiousness, no glamour of sentiment or imagination, no blindness of hero-worship. Little Nell, as presented by this school, would be simply a ragged, dirty little beggar girl, Dinah Morris an ignorant fanatic, the ladies of Cranford gossiping, small-minded old maids, and Colonel Newcome a silly, gullible though worthy example of the hide-bound British soldier. Readers would readily have accepted such presentments, for they themselves had begun to laugh, with indul-

gent superiority, at their simple-minded forefathers who had been moved and delighted by such obviously unreal and sentimentalized figures.

The second essential quality was cleverness, or, more properly, smartness. It was towards the attainment of this quality that large sections of Edwardian society directed their most strenuous efforts; and the ideals of life necessarily become the ideals of literature. An Edwardian must be smart, in his dress, in his manner, in his conversation, in all the appurtenances of his daily life. He must live in a smart neighbourhood, he must frequent smart society, he must read smart books. For the old masterpieces he had no use. The brilliance of George Meredith was almost as alien to him as the wide humanity of Dickens; for smartness is a surface quality, easily apprehended, while brilliance requires insight and understanding. He must look to the new writers to give him what he wanted, and they did their best. They created a literature dominated by realism and smartness. Before these devastating influences grace and charm wilted and true humour almost disappeared; but Edwardian readers were satisfied.

On the summit of Edwardian society moved the Smart Set, that is the circle that gathered round the new king. It was very different from the exclusive company that had been admitted to the intimacy of his mother. It consisted largely of dukes, duchesses and millionaires, but it admitted Jews, Americans and the newly rich, without much regard to their descent or to their breeding. The King, we are told, was ready to receive anyone who could amuse him, and to do this it was necessary to be smart. But the members of this highly placed circle as pictured, for example, in Miss Sackville-West's *The Edwardians* scarcely seem to have fulfilled this requirement. They were beautiful—some of them; they dressed exquisitely; they kept all the unwritten laws of etiquette; they had a serene and dignified confidence in their own pre-eminence; they were habitually but discreetly immoral in their sexual relations; but they were not witty or even lively and certainly not amusing. The Souls had broken up, and intellect was but lightly regarded. Lady Roehampton, Miss Sackville-West tells us, could always be trusted not to bore His Majesty, and could generally succeed in making him laugh, but her conversation and her general behaviour as recorded in *The Edwardians* give no indication as to how she accomplished these things. She did not, it is clear, obtain much

help from the reading of books. To Lady Roehampton "as to most of her acquaintances the life of pleasure was all in all; neither books, art, nor music meant anything to her except in so far as their topicality formed part of the social equipment." She read nothing except occasionally the latest novel of H. G. Wells. Her friends occasionally read a fashionable biography, especially if it referred to members of their own circle, and she listened to their gossip and managed to pick up some scraps of information which at any subsequent discussion she could retail as her own.

The cult of smartness was not confined to dwellers on the summit of society. It spread downwards along the slopes, extending almost to the base. But while in those uppermost regions there reigned the calm of a superb arrogance the zones below were agitated by the struggles of those who tried to reach a higher social level. In the zone that extended next the summit this agitation was strongest, for here dwelt the rich and the leisured who could, with singleness of purpose, practise the arts of the climber. These people also were known as the Smart Set; the term, as generally used, was more often applied to them than to the class above them. They cultivated smartness with a painstaking thoroughness that was almost heroic, and they outdid those they aped. They were, if we may rely on "Rita" and Miss Marie Corelli who castigated them in their novels, and Father Bernard Vaughan and the Reverend F. B. Meyer who denounced them from their respective pulpits, entirely wicked and despicable. They drank to excess, they took drugs, they were openly and scandalously unchaste, they had neither honesty nor dignity in their money transactions. The women painted their faces (whereas the slight touch of rouge used by Lady Rochampton shocked the members of her exclusive circle), and unashamedly offered their daughters for sale to the highest bidder (whereas Miss Sackville-West's duchess, with only a weak protest, allowed her daughter to jeopardize her chances of fashionable marriage by going to live alone in a flat). "The slave market of the Turk is every whit as respectable as those salons where year after year the young debutante is put up for auction and warned that the sole duty of her social existence is the catching of a rich or titled husband, no matter what his moral record may be," declared Rita, in one of a series of articles called "The Sin and Scandal of the Smart Set" that she wrote for *The Gentlewoman* in 1904.

The members of the Smart Set were neither enraged nor abashed at the campaign thus directed against them. Rita's articles they found almost as entertaining as the private scandals discussed with so much relish in their drawing-rooms, and Father Vaughan's sermons constituted a fashionable excitement; while to be singled out for special denunciation was looked upon as a distinction that gave one a place in the most advanced rank of society. Father Vaughan's biographer, Father C. C. Martindale, says:—

In the season of 1906 Father Vaughan preached sermons which he afterwards published in book form under the title *The Sins of Society*. . . . The book ran into at least fourteen editions, and was published by Kegan Paul and Co. The sermons had every kind of success including that of "scandal." Farm Street Church was crammed Sunday by Sunday with crowds described as obviously smart or patently suburban according as each paper thought its readers had been there or had not. . . . Society leaders gave "Vaughan luncheons." . . . *Punch* devoted one of *Blanche's Letters* wholly to the sermons, and was at least good-tempered.

The *Letters* were supposed to be written by "Trixie, Lady Larkington." The one that appeared in the issue of June 10th began:—

Blanche, dearest, have you heard the news? My little Free and Easies have been *pointedly* referred to in the last Reformation Sermon. Isn't it lovely! I feel two inches taller. I've had such heaps of congratulations by phone and wire.

In one of her notorious *Gentlewoman* articles Rita said, "There are people who declare that the Lady Kenny in Ouida's *Massarenes* was a well-known smart woman; that her shameless marriage was a fact patent to the set she graced and the race she so dishonoured." Ouida's novel, *The Massarenes*, was written in 1897, and therefore can only represent society as it was before the forces that were making for the disintegration of Victorianism had completed their work upon it; but since it was widely read and acclaimed during the early years of Edward VII it may perhaps be admissible to take it as holding good for that period also. At the time of its publication it had a great success. Ouida's reputation as an immoral writer had by this time somewhat faded, partly because public taste had lost much of its fastidiousness, partly because her flam-

boyancy had been chastened and she wrote in a more conventional style. *The Massarenes* was read everywhere, even in the refined and exclusive circle made up of the cathedral dignitaries of Polchester, to which Mr. Hugh Walpole introduces us in his novel, *The Cathedral*. The arbiter of this circle, the autocratic Archdeacon, was not shocked, as a parent of the 'sixties and 'seventies would have been, when his seventeen-year-old schoolgirl daughter expressed a wish to read *The Massarenes*. "The girls say it's lovely," she declared. Her mother, it is true, made a mild protest. "I've heard of it, dear. Mrs. Sampson was talking about it. She says it's not a nice book at all." But the Archdeacon treated the matter as of little moment, and let his consent go by default; and when, soon afterwards, on a visit to London he saw the railway bookstall piled high with copies of the "trashy novel," he only sniffed contemptuously and wondered how intelligent people could enjoy reading such stuff. The book told the story of an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Massarene, vulgar and uneducated, who, from keeping a hot-pie shop in Western America, had risen to enormous wealth. They were ambitious to enter London society and were taken in hand by Lady Kenny, a beautiful siren, who exploited and insulted them. Lady Kenny had married the degenerate, vice-enfeebled son of a noble family on the understanding—perfectly clear to both—that she should keep her lover and be free to do as she pleased in all matters of conduct and that the same liberty should be accorded to him. The greater part of the book is taken up with accounts of her shameless manœuvres to extort money from any man who succumbed to her wiles, and the miseries and humiliations suffered by the Massarenes in their attempts to force their way into high society under her contemptuous guidance.

Another picture of the Smart Set was given in the *Visits of Elizabeth*, by Elinor Glyn, published in 1901. Here Elizabeth was represented as a young, beautiful and unsophisticated girl who had been carefully brought up in a Victorian home by a Victorian mother. When the time came for her to enter society she was sent on a round of visits to her mother's highly placed and fashionable friends. Among these she showed herself a sort of *enfant terrible* seeing and hearing many things to which she should have been discreetly blind and deaf, and publicly relating her experiences and asking for explanations, to the extreme embarrassment of the company. The revelations made in this artfully artless fashion show

a society essentially vicious, though the lightness of treatment to some extent disguises its corruption. The first book was so popular that other instalments of the *Visits of Elizabeth* followed. Mrs. C. Peel, O.B.E., calls them "those delicious visits of Elizabeth," and says that through them Mrs. Elinor Glyn, "red-haired and extraordinarily striking," became a celebrity. Mrs. Gertrude Atherton describes the *Visits* as very naughty and very clever, "giving startling side-lights on country-house life in England." She notes that in this book Mrs. Glyn invented the word "boring."

The critics, Mrs. Glyn declares, were simply delighted with the book, and so were all her friends. Mr. W. H. Mallock wrote her a charming letter about it. "One or two old ladies wrote to the papers and said it was shockingly immoral but they were answered superbly by a wit who called himself Toby Belch." There were, actually, many readers besides "one or two old ladies" who looked unfavourably upon the work, though it was generally acknowledged to have a foundation of fact. "In spite of glaring vulgarity and crude exaggeration," says G. W. E. Russell, "*The Visits of Elizabeth* portrayed a certain aspect of social life."

Encouraged by the success of the *Visits* Mrs. Glyn went on writing novels of the same type, though Mrs. Peel says that never again did she write anything to compare with her first effort. In 1902 came *The Reflections of Ambrosine*, and in 1907 *Three Weeks*, the most notorious of them all. It is a luscious and extravagantly emotional story of how an English boy, fresh from Eton and Oxford, was sent by his parents on a European tour in the hope of curing him of an attack of calf-love; how in Paris he met at his hotel a mysterious and exotically lovely female aged about thirty-five; how the two fell in love at first sight, and spent a rapturous three weeks together under conditions of luxury and sensuous enjoyment such as must have taxed Mrs. Glyn's powers to describe; until, a faithful servant having given dark warning of fearful danger looming over the pair, the lady disappeared, and the youth was left heartbroken and desolate. She was, it transpired, the queen of some small and remote European state, married, for political reasons, to a brutal husband who constantly ill-treated her, and finally killed her by a dagger thrust after she had borne a son to her English boy-lover.

There was still a considerable section of the public sufficiently fastidious to be disgusted with this book. An outcry was made

which, the author says, prejudiced subsequent readers before they came to it. She herself could not see why *Three Weeks* was considered immoral, and cites the influence which the love episode was said to have had on the character of the young man as entirely refuting the charge. She tells also of a Scottish Professor of the History of Religion and the Head Master of a Public School who, having prejudged the book as being bad and vicious, were converted after reading it to her own view of its morality. Most discriminating readers probably took the view expressed by Arnold Bennett. He read *Three Weeks* at the request of a friend, who said she herself liked it, though she thought it vulgar. "Naïve and worthless utterly," he said. "Its naughtiness which has caused such extraordinary protests in England is merely childish in its imitative conventionality of wickedness. A réchauffé of Ouida."

On the whole the outcry against the book tended to increase its sale, which was enormous. It was dramatized, but its production was forbidden by the Censor, whereupon the author and her friends arranged for a private performance at the Strand Theatre, Mrs. Glyn herself taking the part of the heroine. She received, she says, warm congratulations both on the play and on her own acting from a large circle of friends, among whom was Lord Curzon. Lord Esher cites the interest shown in this performance as a sign of the degeneracy of the age. "What of the Strand on the day of the performance of *Three Weeks*?" he says. "Teeming with carriages of the smart set flooding to see a play barred by the Censor."

The Smart Set boasted openly of having read the books that their fathers had read by stealth. "It was typical of the Victorian and post-Victorian ages," says Shane Leslie, "that up to 1900 everybody pretended he had not read George Moore, while under King Edward all pretended they had." True, Mrs. Elinor Glyn says that many years after the publication of *Three Weeks* people would come up to her and say with a knowing wink, "Oh, I read your book *Three Weeks* when I was fifteen. I had to keep it under my pillow, though." It was perhaps this book that H. A. Vachell had in mind when in *The Other Side* he described the story that pretty eighteen-year-old Mollie Archdale was reading by stealth in bed one spring evening somewhere about 1908.

The novel had enjoyed a vogue because of its subtlety and daring. It dealt with certain incidents connected with the breaking of the seventh Commandment, and the evil in the book was the greater

because, obviously, the sympathies of the writer included the sin with the sinners. . . . Upon every page an appeal to the senses presented itself with diabolical suggestiveness.

In many families, however, the young people might have read such books quite openly, without danger of reprimand. Except in those households where Victorian ideals were cherished parental supervision of the young people's reading had ceased. The literature of the day was freely admitted, openly displayed, and read by old and young alike. Mrs. Humphry Ward, in *Richard Meynell*, tells how visitors to Catherine Elsmere's sister Rose found "two recent novels, both of them brilliant glorifications of sordid forms of adultery," lying on her drawing-room table; and poor Catherine felt herself quite out of touch with the young people "who discussed a wild literature and appeared to be without awe towards God or reverence towards man."

Another critic of the degeneration of the age was T. W. H. Crosland, a very widely read journalist and writer on social topics. He did not agree that the chief sinners were to be found among the high-born and fashionable members of society. In his book, *The Wicked Life*, published in 1905, he wrote:—

That charming Scotch lady, Rita, who apparently moves like a glistening planet in the very highest circles, has been at trouble to pourtray for us, in colours which glow and live, what she calls "the sin and scandal of the smart set."

But she had, Mr. Crosland contended, applied these colours in the wrong place. The salons she pictured existed only in her imagination and "the possible imagination of Miss Marie Corelli." The wicked life, he maintained, might be defined roughly as the life led by the rich commercial class. They had no culture and no breeding to enlighten the pure sensuality of their lives, which were ugly and tedious as well as immoral.

Yet the divergence between Rita and Mr. Crosland is not perhaps as great as it would at first appear, since many members of the commercial classes who had attained to wealth did actually form part of the circle which she condemned. If they were rich enough and had sufficient pushfulness and self-assurance they might be allowed entrance. The Massarenes, it is true, were unlucky, but they had not these qualities and they fell into bad

hands. The Gurrages who appear in *The Reflections of Ambrosine* were much more successful. They were as essentially vulgar as the Massarenes, and had made their fortune in carpets, but they had impudence, and an unassailable belief in the supreme importance of money. The son followed the example of others of his kind and married a girl of noble but impoverished family; and thereafter entertained dukes and countesses and Cabinet ministers, had a scandalous affair with a lady of title, and finally drank himself to death, quite as if he had been from the first a member of the Smart Set which he had stormed. Among the women, the code of morality for the transplanted commercial lady was the same as for the higher born native. Fidelity to the marriage vow was neither expected nor admired, but affairs must be conducted with discretion. "You remain at home until you are found out," said one of the older ladies of *Ambrosine*, summing up the sexual morality of the later generation, "and then the husband takes a gratuity, and the matter is hushed up, and probably the lover passes on to your best friend with an added feather in his cap."

The reading of this section of society was a little more extended than that of the section immediately above them, for they hoped to obtain from books some help in the achievement of the purpose towards which most of their thoughts and energies were directed—the ascent to the summit of Edwardian society. They read the fashionable novels of the day; they had a touching faith in Rita and Elinor Glyn and the French novelists, including the lady who wrote under the name of "Gyp." They had no interest in the "common" people of whom Hardy told, and Meredith's books, they said, were far too clever for them. Cleverness, apart from smartness, was not appreciated in their circle. A few, like Mrs. Perce, of E. F. Benson's *The Osbornes*, affected a love of high-brow literature as a means of social advancement, gushed over *Hamlet* and quoted Swinburne, but most of these soon deserted that line of approach, for in Edwardian society poetry was not considered "smart."

"In Edwardian London . . . Art and Literature were confined as far as possible to a world of their own which young men who took the ballroom floor were expected to avoid," says Mr. Douglas Goldring.

Below the Smart Set came the Suburbans. They inhabited a wide zone, subdivided to accommodate descending social grades,

from that of the University educated professional and business man to that of the clerk and the small shopkeeper. T. W. H. Crosland who wrote *The Wicked Life* wrote also *The Suburbans*, describing a class with which he professed a close and intimate acquaintance. "I claim," he said,

to be in a position to recognize the Hampstead woman, the lady from Lee or Lewisham, the man from Clapham, the gentleman from Surbiton, or the hobbledehoy from Bedford Park at sight. . . . To the superior mind, in fact, suburban is a sort of label which may properly be applied to pretty well everything on the earth that is ill-conditioned, undesirable and unholy.

The suburbs, Mr. Crosland held, were essentially the offspring of snobbery. The Suburbans, like the class above them, desired of all things to be "smart," and they were indefatigable in their efforts to push themselves into a higher social circle. Their standard of success was a large acquaintance among "classy" people. Their taste in literature he considered to be, like themselves, despicable. Their ideal comic author was Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, and when they wanted pathos they turned to the "weepier productions" of J. M. Barrie. They bought numbers of cheap editions of the classics and set them up with pride in ornamental bookcases, never reading them, but regarding them as furniture. The publication of these cheap editions was, in Mr. Crosland's opinion, an unmixed evil. Their possession gave their purchasers a false sense of being educated, and so they bought no modern books and remained mentally inert, and satisfied. The only author really popular among the Suburbans was, said Mr. Crosland, H. G. Wells, himself a typical product of Suburbia. "He made his reputation, such as it is, out of a thrice suburbanized science, blown up and eked out by a mechanical suburban imagination."

Mr. G. W. E. Russell looked on the Suburbans with a kindlier and more sympathetic eye. In his *A Londoner's Log Book*, he described, not Suburbia in general, but his own particular suburb as it was in 1901-2, and showed it to be quite a pleasant place to live in if one could bring a humorous indulgence to bear upon its little foibles and pretences. It was an eminently genteel suburb, and contained one lady of title, who constituted, the other residents proudly felt, a link with the Smart Set of the higher regions. They read with deep interest the society journals, which detailed the

doings of this set and pronounced authoritatively on its laws and customs; and they were specially devoted to *Classy Cuttings*, from which they learnt, to their great benefit and edification, such valuable facts as "It is not necessary to offer cold meat with five o'clock tea, unless you are entertaining royalty."

The centre of the society of this suburb was the Vicar, the Reverend Lancelot Ludovic Soulsby—the same whose faith had been shaken by *Robert Elsmere* and re-established by *Lux Mundi*. He was a Cambridge man whose academic career had culminated in an *Ægrotat* in Botany; but he "loved culture and ensued it." He quoted freely in his sermons from the poetry of Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold, and was anxious always to show that he kept abreast of modern thought. The Vicar's wife had "a little money" and was At Home on Thursdays in her elegant drawing-room, papered with Morris's pomegranate paper. Here the ladies of the parish met and discussed, with discreet reservations, the literature of the day. Few gentlemen presented themselves at these functions, except the curate, and he was scarcely regarded as an acquisition. He was a strapping youth with none of his Vicar's soulful tendencies, and his views on literature were apt to cause a flutter at the Thursday At Homes. On one of these occasions he cheerfully gave it as his opinion that Ibsen was "a fair rotter," which lapse produced an awful silence, until the Vicar's wife hurriedly began to talk about the poetry of Mr. Stephen Phillips. At intervals courses of lectures were arranged. One of these was on *The Humorists of Queen Victoria's Reign*, from which company Dickens was, surprisingly, excluded. "Dickens is no humorist," declared the lecturer, an eminent barrister; and his genteel audience accepted his dictum, reminding one another that Dickens really *was* coarse, and that the dear Vicar had said, "Dickens is an author I have never been able to appreciate."

The novelists of the day were inclined to look upon the Suburbans with the eye of Mr. Russell rather than that of Mr. Crosland. They were mildly sarcastic rather than denunciatory, and allowed to their Suburbans some sterling, even attractive qualities. John Oliver Hobbes in *The Dream and the Business*, published in 1906, gave interesting pictures of several types. There was Dr. Fir-malden, pastor of a large Congregational chapel in Bayswater, who was a man of learning and fine literary taste. In his home literature of the best type was read—not many modern books but the works

of the great writers of the past, in poetry, philosophy and religion. Dr. Firmalden's brother, who had made a fortune in silk and lived in Inverness Terrace, had little interest in any books except those on religious subjects; his wife read nothing but spiritualistic novels with such titles as *The Love Beyond*, of which Mudie's brought her a parcel every week. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Twomley, wife of a successful builder and decorator, read nothing; she "cared nothing for society, politics, art, literature or philanthropy." Her home at Hampstead was her universe, "her husband and her three children were the human race, Almighty God was Almighty God, and the Reverend Luke Heathfield was the preacher of his word. On these broad, simple lines Mrs. Twomley conducted her comfortable establishment." Then there were the Clootses, mother and daughter, who lived at High Barnet in a semi-detached cottage which they called "The Elms." "No devotee of religion ever suffered as Mrs. Cloots and Nannie suffered in their worship of the Smart Set." They would go without a meal in order to keep up their subscriptions for all the best Society journals and fashion papers. They lived on jam and bloater paste and cheap tea in order to pay for velveteen dresses and picture hats. "Oh, Jim, I wish to God that I were smart," cried pretty Nanny Cloots to Dr. Firmalden's son (accepted in default of the rich and noble lover of whose appearance she had almost despaired). "If I had been born a smart girl with lots of money I could loll back in me carriage and pair, and go to balls every night and get me frocks from Paris and be called your ladyship. I should be surrounded by all the smart men." And she was not in the least consoled when her lover told her, "You are divinely beautiful. A divinely beautiful being could never be smart."

Another type of Suburban is presented in the Stanleys of H. G. Wells's *Ann Veronica*. They lived in the new and undeveloped suburb of Morningside Park, which is in the direction of Surbiton. Mr. Stanley was a well-to-do solicitor whose hobby was technical microscopy and whose favourite reading was healthy light fiction with chromatic titles—*The Red Sword*, *The Black Helmet*, *The Purple Robe*. Such titles were fashionable about this time; we remember *The Blue Lagoon*, *Under the Red Robe*, *The Lilac Sunbonnet*. The one fault of this fiction, as far as Mr. Stanley was concerned, was that, unlike the novels of his earlier days, it dealt lightly with parental rights. He himself took the view that his

daughter was his property, and bound to obey him in all things, which assumptions his daughter, Ann Veronica, entirely repudiated. She had had a High School education, had "gone in" for science, had read what she pleased, including sex novels and social propaganda, and was much influenced by friends among the advanced Women's Rights party. She claimed her "rights," and among them the right to have the man she wanted in spite of such obstacles as the man's wife and his vicious record. It was this determination, expressed crudely and lustfully, that caused *Ann Veronica*, when it was published in 1909, to be denounced by the *Spectator* and banned by some of the libraries. The Smart Set might accept such a book, but intelligent, high-minded middle-class people—and there were many such, in spite of Mr. Crosland—saw in Ann Veronica their own daughters, and protested accordingly.

On the lower slopes of Edwardian society the rage for smartness still persisted. Mass production was bringing into the market cheap imitations of costly fashions in clothes, furniture and other necessities of daily life, and this, while it raised the standard of comfort, tended also to encourage pretentiousness, and a love of what was tawdry and shoddy. "The term 'smart' is now on the lips of every shop-girl and servant maid. Pray Heaven *that* may send the odious term out of fashion," said Rita. As for books, the inhabitants of these lower slopes took very little interest in them; all they asked was a plentiful supply of the productions of the New Journalism. Edward Henry Machin, of Arnold Bennett's *The Card*, the smartest man in the Five Towns, belonged, by birth and upbringing, to this region; and he had never read any poetry in his life, not a line, and had no idea whether the works of Shakespeare were in verse or in prose. "His sure instinct had always warned him against being drawn into Shakespeare." Even when he had attained considerable wealth his only literary purchase was a set of the *Encyclopaedia* in a revolving bookcase, which he considered an attractive piece of furniture.

Yet although the Smart Set, with its extensions downwards, undoubtedly did exist in Edwardian days, and may be regarded as a product of the reaction against Victorianism, there remained then—as there remains always—a large proportion of the English people indifferent to fashion's ruling, and only slightly affected by the passing tendencies of the age. There were, in every walk of life, men and women of sense and intellect who went quietly on.

their way, ordered their lives according to their own ideals, and put work and duty before pleasure. Mr. Douglas Jerrold has described the Edwardian age as one in which extreme luxury and extreme poverty existed, but merely as "excrescences on the life of a nation predominantly in regular employment, taking its colour from a vast, sober world of clever artisans, thrifty, liberal-minded and religious"; and if this is a somewhat too favourable estimate it is certain that there was a large body of men and women, sturdy, honest, sensible and hardworking, which kept the country steady even when the wind of frivolity blew most strongly. Among these people books of the Victorian type were still popular. They liked their stories to have a religious tendency and to end happily. Mrs. Florence Barclay was one of their favourite authors; her *The Rosary* had an enormous sale. Edna Lyall's books were read widely among them, and so were those of Ethel Dell. The girls delighted in L. T. Meade. The more highly educated chose their books from the whole range of English literature without regard to what was the rage of the moment. Some of the less mentally alert, it is true, read little except *Answers* and *Home Chat*, but they escaped some of the worst effects of such reading by bringing a sturdy common sense to bear upon the information given by such journals. And many were not incapable of joy in fine literature. Even H. G. Wells's Mr. Polly, who was one of the weaker members of the band, found beauty and delight in books. He made eager choice, from libraries and second-hand bookstalls, of what pleased him best—*Tom Cringle's Log*, *The Island Night's Entertainment*, *Tales of Old Japan*, *Wanderings in South America*, with the works of Thackeray, Fenimore Cooper, Conrad and Dumas; until at last he gained courage to free himself by a desperate, valiant, if unlawful effort from the custom of ugliness that had ruled his life. His fellow shopman, Parsons, loved Shakespeare and Milton and found joy in reciting passages from their works, regardless of time and place. These two, vulgar and ignorant as they were in some respects, are typical of a valuable element that existed in a public which was being strongly swayed by mass impulse. They, with their betters, stood firm in the crowd that lived and moved, loved and scorned as fashion decreed.

In the descriptions of Edwardian society that have been quoted, H. G. Wells has been mentioned as having readers in several of its sections, but nothing has been said of the other three prominent

Edwardian writers, Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton and Bernard Shaw. Yet they each had a large following, and, with H. G. Wells, were kept constantly before the public eye. Almost every day there were references to one or more of these four in the newspapers and popular journals, and this alone was enough to give them notoriety. To compare them to the great Victorians is to realize the descent that had been made. To listen to the comments of their contemporaries is to realize how these writers failed to make themselves, as the great Victorians had done, a part of the national life; to realize, also, the reasons for their failure.

In the first place it is to be noticed that the comments are comparatively few. The Edwardians did not talk familiarly of Wells and Bennett, Chesterton and Shaw as their fathers had talked of Dickens and Thackeray, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë. There were reviews, of course, and formal criticisms, but the intimate, interested note is missing. Each book as it came was received with applause by the large section of the public to which it appealed, but there was no general excitement, no warmth of personal welcome. Everyone agreed that the works were clever. "Chock full of cleverness—often too clever by half; I mean that truth is sacrificed to epigram," as Lord Esher said of Chesterton's essay on Browning. John Middleton Murry said he was astounded at the cleverness of Chesterton's writing; and to be astounded means to stand aside and gaze, not to receive with joy. It was the same with the other three writers. John Bailey said, after reading Bennett's *The Card*, "The book is great rubbish; clever rubbish, of course; but no joy nor sorrow in it; no passion, no emotion; no human—nor any other sort of—nature, and least of all any poetry. The man is a clever, cold, shallow journalist." Shaw, John Bailey put much on the same level. "Was there ever a man with so little poetry in his brain?" he exclaimed. "Shaw is not in the running as a creative artist," said Middleton Murry. H. G. Wells's cleverness suited admirably the scientific romances with which he began his career, and which brought him many admirers; but when he began to apply it to stories of ordinary people many of these fell away. Mrs. Humphry Ward described him as "a journalist of very great powers, unequal education, and much crudity of mind who has inadvertently strayed into the literature of the imagination." He had, she said, "not a particle of charm," and the snarl was never

long absent from his works. "Have you read *Marriage?*?" wrote Edmund Gosse to Henry James. "Too hard, metallic, rhetorical. I plucked up courage in both hands and told him so—warned him against the growing *hardness* of his books." John Bailey thought *Marriage* "as good as a book can be which is not aware that there has been any great literature in the world."

Anne Douglas Sedgwick in her letters to various friends discusses all four of these writers fully and illuminatingly. "I'm reading Chesterton's *Heretics*," she wrote in July 1905.

It is a pity that a man who when he first began struck one as a fresh delightful force with all his silliness and glibness should now come to be almost insufferable from his forcing of his own note; his cheap emphasis, his glib assurance; and at the same time, even while one jibbs impatiently one feels him so often still so clever and clear-sighted—if only he would let himself alone more.

Of Shaw she said, "In spite of his wit and *withering* insight I don't feel that his range is very large"; and later, "I think that it's Shaw's incapacity to see anything noble in actuality that is his gravest defect, but he is a difficult creature to make up one's mind about." Arnold Bennett she admired; she thought *Clayhanger* "a very remarkable, even a wonderful book." She did not find in it "any person so engrossing as a character as Sophia in *The Old Wives' Tale*; parts of the beginning bored me; but its hold tightens as it goes on." She liked, too, some of H. G. Wells's novels. *Love and Mr. Lewisham* she called "really very beautiful"; it had, she thought, "with all its relentlessness, the 'sense of tears in mortal things' that Shaw, so complacently, lacks."

All this cleverness was very amusing. These Edwardian writers were primarily entertainers, and as such they did their work well. Everyone left the show they had prepared immensely tickled and quite ready to go again. "Bernard Shaw and G. K. Chesterton," said Mrs. Desmond Humphreys (Rita), "have afforded me an immense amount of pleasure and amusement," and there was a large company of readers in hearty agreement with her. Even when serious or painful subjects were introduced, as they often were, they were surrounded by such a diverting display of epigram and paradox that no hearts were wrung as hearts had been wrung by the simpler presentments of an earlier generation. "Read *Major Barbara*," wrote John Bailey.

I think it may be a good thing that these social nightmares should be set on us, but this is not the way in which any solution can come, for there is no healing in it and no love.

Canon Barnett was even less appreciative. He thought there was no inspiration in the play, nothing to make us feel that there is some truth behind its prevailing irony, something to die for. I doubt if beyond making for thought it makes for anything else. Does satire ever do any good?

As for the characters in the works of these Edwardian entertainers not one of them ever came to life and joined the company—we will not say of the immortals, with Mr. Pickwick, Colonel Newcome and Mrs. Poyser, but even of the long-lived with Mrs. Proudie, Miss Mattie and Gabriel Betteridge. They acted their parts with slick efficiency on the stage that was set for them, and retired amidst the applause of the audience who thought of them only as puppets with movements controlled by the clever man who pulled the wires. “His men and women—pert, sensible or fretfully sentimental—are all just alike,” complained Anne Douglas Sedgwick of Shaw. “His characters seemed to have been mixed and concocted in the laboratory,” said Dorothy Cheston Bennett of H. G. Wells. “People are simply warned that there are ideas in my books, and advised not to read them,” complained Mr. Wells; but it was not the ideas that discriminating readers objected to, it was the attempt to make ideas into men and women who had few of the attributes of humanity except the power of violent and ungraceful motion. John Freeman wrote:—

Tono Bungay is as clearly representative of the early bubbling twentieth century as any book of Dickens of the early nineteenth. Here is a novel in which the protagonists . . . are not love and honour, this and that woman, passion and ambition, but the spirit of order and disorder, the frail Spirit of the future and the giant spirit of the past.

To the ordinary reader the book would probably present itself rather as a study of quackery and snobbery, thinly disguised as a story. “Wells at his highest writes a social tract instead of a novel,” said John Middleton Murry. As a social historian he is, indeed, invaluable, in the matter of books and readers as well as conditions of life.

Shaw, too, though perhaps a more successful entertainer than any of the others, gave to his readers and to the audiences who came to his plays little except ideas, brilliantly, if sometimes confusingly enunciated by characters who made little pretence of individuality. A. J. Balfour, Mr. E. T. Raymond tells us, had a just appreciation of Shaw's powers as a dramatist:—

It is said that he went five times to see *John Bull's Other Island*, inviting first Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and then Mr. Asquith. But there is no indication that he looks on Shaw as more than an amusing journalist, who spins out a leading article to the length of a play and contrives to make it interesting throughout.

Stopford Brooke wrote in his diary in 1908:—

Read at night *Man and Superman*. I daresay Shaw thinks it is the best thing he has done. I don't. It is long-winded to amazement. It's just a "Commonplace Book" into which he has flung pell-mell all his freaks and fancies and thoughts and games about society; and man and woman, both in capital letters.

Henry Hyndman, who was in sympathy with many of Shaw's political views, could get nothing from *Man and Superman*.

I re-read it with close attention. I confess, here and now, that the higher parts of my being are quite unmoved. The whole thing, from start to finish, is burlesque. . . . Do what I would, I could not lose sight of the hands of the marionette manipulator behind the scenes as his puppets danced to his twitches at the wires.

Few people came away from these Edwardian entertainments cherishing the moral that had been presented to them, though the voice of the preacher was usually (except in the case of Arnold Bennett) as insistent if not as overpowering as in the shows given by Marie Corelli and Hall Caine. They read the books, as John Middleton Murry says he read at the age of twenty *Tono Bungay* and *The New Machiavelli*, with "simple enjoyment." In the same spirit the works of Shaw, Wells and Bennett were received when read aloud in the family of Sir Oliver Lodge. To Lady Asquith, Chesterton and Shaw were "perpetual wells of delight." A. J. Balfour enjoyed Chesterton as an epigrammatist; Mrs. Meynell found him "the wittiest as well as the most serious of living writers." Mrs. Gertrude Atherton condoned Arnold Bennett's lapses into tedious detail. "He must, she said, "have maddened his readers

at times, but personally I never cared what he wrote if only he would write it." Dorothy Cheston Bennett took him very seriously. She said:—

He had helped me, as he had helped many others, to see less superficially, because more imaginatively, the very stuff and pattern of existence as it is for innumerable average persons. He had even lifted an intolerable weight from my mind which had at one time crushed me with a sense of general as apart from personal hopelessness—concerning existence as it must be for those millions of average persons (including probably myself), and he had lightened the gloomy sense that life for those millions must be intolerably petty, monotonous and powerless of much achievement.

This, however, was probably a case of special sympathy. Lady Ritchie would probably have agreed, for she said, "I am reading that clever, *clever* novel of Arnold Bennett's, *Whom God Hath Joined*. He has discovered how interesting uninteresting things and people are." Robertson Nicoll, his wife says, was "one of the very earliest to point out the supreme merit of the *Old Wives' Tale*" which may well be said to be about uninteresting people. Bishop Talbot saw little of "supreme merit" in the story. "I was not bored with it," he wrote to his son "(I have sometimes said I didn't find a dull page in it). So I cannot say I was. What I did feel was its utter moral vacuity. It pointed nowhere and carried you nowhere."

On the whole, perhaps, most thoughtful readers who lived in the Edwardian age, looking back now on the writers who then entertained them, would accept Henry James's criticism on H. G. Wells as applying to the whole company. After reading *Marriage* James wrote to Mrs. Humphry Ward:—

Strange to me . . . the co-existence of so much talent with so little art, so much life, with (so to speak) so little living. But . . . I really think him more interesting by his faults than he will probably manage to be in any other way; and he is a most vivid and violent object lesson.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PERSISTENT VICTORIANS

MR. KENNETH GRAHAME, in the course of a lecture delivered in the village hall of Pangbourne, in 1930, said:—

Many years ago I found myself sitting at dinner, or at the close of dinner, next to Francis Turner Palgrave. . . . And I remember his turning to me and saying, “Now you are a good deal younger than I am, and I want you to tell me, is there any real merit at all in any of these new writers whose names I hear so frequently, there is a young man called Stevenson, for instance, and another called Kipling. Is there really any lasting worth in what they write or are they just the fleeting fashion of the day?” Well, I did my best to give him a résumé of the qualities of these two writers, and I ventured to suggest that if he could spare an hour or two to the work of either or both of them I thought his time would not have been wasted. He only shook his head rather sadly, “My interest in English literature,” he said, “stopped short at Tennyson. He was, to me, the culminating point. I didn’t care, somehow, to go any further. I have never read the later writers.”

This must have been only a few years after Tennyson’s death, for Palgrave died in 1897, leaving his *Golden Treasury* as his testimony to the real love and appreciation of poetry—previous to Tennyson. He was born in 1824, so that nearly the whole of his reading life was passed under the rule of Victoria, and he represents a large class of his contemporaries on whom the anti-Victorian movement of the ‘nineties had no influence whatever. “You will find the same sort of idea—this idea of the finality of Tennyson—in books such as Edward FitzGerald’s memoirs and in various memoirs and reminiscences by famous men who were contemporary with Tennyson or slightly older,” Mr. Kenneth Grahame went on to say.

There were younger men, too, belonging to a generation later than that of these Tennyson adherents who felt that English literature, as far as they were concerned, faded out after 1890. Mr. Augustine Birrell, who was born in 1850, and lived until 1936, said that he was “conscious of a growing indifference to new books,”

meaning by new books works of poetry and fiction published for the first time since (let me name a date without tying myself down to it) 1890. . . . This does not mean that I have not read hundreds of books published since 1890—novels and a few poems—but that none of them have gripped me as did their elder brethren and sisters.

For Mr. Birrell, not Tennyson, but Matthew Arnold was the faithfully loved Victorian poet:—

Arnold's poetry has been my companion for more than sixty years. I have never tired of it, and never shall. He is an indoor and out-of-door poet; for Sundays and week-days; at home or abroad; in sorrow and in joy; in moods grave or gay.

Mr. Lewis May's reading goes a little but not much farther than Mr. Birrell's. He says:—

My powers of assimilation, so far as poetry is concerned came to an end somewhere about 1898 with Watson, Dowson and Davidson, and—greatest of all Francis Thompson. That I miss a great deal in accepting this limitation I do not doubt. But the fact is, some of the later manifestations of the poetic genius alarm and bewilder me. I cannot follow them. I prefer to remain a case of arrested development.

The older and stiffer Victorians would probably reprove Mr. Lewis May for undue modesty, and say that the arrested development was not in the reader, but in the literature, which, instead of continuing the upward development of the Victorian period, had broken away from the parent stem and produced strange and unnatural growths. The younger and more supple-minded readers, while they honoured Mr. May's loyalty, would agree that his limitations were to be deplored. These, while remaining staunch to their old loves were free also of the new, and took from it as much, or as little, as seemed to them worth taking; as Edith Nesbit did, who, as her biographer has told us, “read the most advanced and challenging literature of the ‘nineties, and managed to appreciate it, without any infidelity to her earlier loves, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and Charles Reade.”

The test of a true persistent Victorian was not that he failed to appreciate the new writers but that the old had the highest and

most honoured place in his affections. It was essential that he should love Tennyson and Dickens; among the others he might choose his favourites, and might place them all in such order as pleased him best. Professor A. C. Bradley has said that in the 'nineties to care for Tennyson's poetry "was to be old-fashioned, and to belittle him was to be in the movement." There were many lovers of Tennyson who were quite content not to be "in the movement." Henry Sidgwick continued to regard Tennyson as "seer and prophet as well as poet," and Frederick Myers, himself a poet as well as a fine classical scholar, to revere the author of *De Profundis* and *The Ancient Sage*, which, he said, expressed his deepest creeds. These were elderly men, Tennyson's contemporaries, but there were younger men who held much the same faith. There was Wilfrid Ward, who in 1890 was thirty-four years old, who also looked to Tennyson as a spiritual guide as well as a great poet; and John Bailey, aged twenty-five, who said on re-reading *In Memoriam*, "It is less profound than I once thought it, but the people who think it profound are far more right than those who think it shallow," and of *Sleep and Rest*, "and then they say—some silly people—that Tennyson ought to have occupied himself with the problems of the age, forsooth!"

Nor was it only among the more highly educated classes that lovers of Tennyson could still be found. Arnold Bennett tells of a bookseller-printer in "the terrible town of Burslem" to whom he once made a remark deprecating Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. "Tears came into his eyes. 'Don't say such a thing! Don't say such a thing!' he protested. The book had meant so much to him." The *Idylls* were—next to the *May Queen*—the most ridiculed of all Tennyson's works. To the new generation they stood for Victorianism at its worst. Robert Lynd, in his essay *On Christmas*, says, "People began to detest Christmas cards as something more Victorian than the *Idylls of the King*." Yet, in 1913, W. J. Locke wrote in his novel, *Stella Maris*:—

The elevated and sophisticated and very highly educated may learn with surprise that the *Idylls of the King* still appeal to ingenuous fifteen. Thank God there are yet remaining also some sentimentalists of fifty who can read them with pleasure and profit.

Robertson Nicoll was bold enough to avow openly his admiration not only of the *Idylls* but also of the *May Queen*. Readers, he said,

laughed at the May Queen because she was unlike the girl of the period. "The objection is that the May Queen was silly. She had but a few simple thoughts in her mind. She was not a Girton girl."

Dickens, by the persistent Victorians, was regarded not as a seer or a prophet, scarcely as a writer, but as an intimate and well-loved friend who entered, through his characters, so closely into their daily lives that they could not think of him with any sort of detachment. He met them at every turn, as the autobiographies of the day show. "Mr. Bounderby used to boast that he was cradled in an egg-box, and I make no secret of the fact that I was educated in a cellar," says Judge Parry, who was one of the younger Victorian survivors, being under thirty when the 'nineties began; and again and again he returns to similar Dickensian comparisons. "Like Vincent Crummles's pony I went on circuit at a very early age." "The crossing-sweeper, like Silas Wegg, was a sort of outdoor servant of the family." The same intimacy is shown in the autobiography of Edmund Yates, who belonged to the older company of the Victorians and died in 1894. "As Mrs. Prig says, the drinks was all good"; his schoolmasters "knew no syllable of French, for which language their contempt was as great as Mr. Lillywick's." Richard Hutton knew much of Dickens by heart, and "appeared to take a kind of physical pleasure in long quotations from the sayings of Mr. Pecksniff." Galsworthy, though in many respects he may be ranked as a modern of the moderns, was yet a Victorian in his admission of Dickens into his life as an honoured friend. "When I was a boy," he said, in an Introduction that he wrote to an edition of *Bleak House*,

reading him with passion, I but vaguely glimpsed his glorious tourney; now that I know the world a little. . . . I never tire of standing by the roadside with a very humble hat in hand to see his gallant and great spirit ride past.

Most eloquent of all is G. K. Chesterton. He writes of Dickens as if they had grown up together; and he sums up, very concisely, his friend's claim to unique honour—"He made things which nobody else could possibly make."

When the young critics pronounced authoritatively that Dickens's characters were not men and women at all, but just presentments of certain qualities and oddities, each tediously reiterating its own catchword, the Victorians smiled; for they

knew that Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Micawber, Mrs. Gamp and Mrs. Nickleby were real persons by the simple test of having lived with them side by side. When they were told that he was coarse and vulgar, they replied if they were wise, in the words of G. K. Chesterton, "You may easily find him vulgar if you do not see that he is divine." When the young people declared that they could see no humour in his works, the Victorians were contented to remember that he could still move men of undoubted intellectual power to Homeric laughter. "In Dickens," says Sir Sidney Colvin,

what Burne-Jones loved especially were the parts more riotously comic. I can see and hear him now shouting with laughter, as he echoed the choicer utterances of Sam Weller or Micawber or Mrs. Gamp, his head flung back and beard in the air.

But they did not trouble themselves very much about these criticisms. They went on enjoying their Dickens and feeling sorry for the new generation that missed so much delight. "The only book I am reading is *Pickwick* and all is peace—*pour le moment*," wrote George Wyndham in 1906; and, later in the same year—

I have just finished reading *Little Dorrit* again. I can't bear to think that I must wait five or ten years—five if greedy, ten if prudent—before reading it yet once more. What a great man Dickens is.

Robertson Nicoll decided that if he were to be snowed up in one of the desolate Scottish farms for a week the book he would choose to have with him would be *Pickwick*. *Pickwick* was, indeed, a very favourite companion of these persistent Victorians. Mr. Dion Calthrop tells how, when he went on a walking tour in the south of France, the books he chose to take with him were *Don Quixote* and *Pickwick*. John Bailey notes in his diary on a day in February 1900, "I lunched with *Pickwick* very pleasantly." "My husband and I read *Pickwick* together, and I laughed until I cried over the fun and humour of this book," says the author of *Middle Age*.

When Mr. Oliver Locker Lampson (as Sir Austen Chamberlain has told us) asked A. J. Balfour, "Mr. Balfour, if you were banished to an island and allowed to take with you the works of only one novelist which would you choose?" Mr. Balfour almost decided

on Dickens; but on further consideration thought that, he being a Scotsman, Sir Walter Scott would perhaps make an even more congenial companion. Scott, though he was not a Victorian, had always been regarded by readers of that age as their special property. To love Scott was almost as invariable a mark of the true Victorian as to love Dickens. Robertson Nicoll re-read a work of Scott's every holiday. He had read *Rob Roy* about sixty times; and the last book that he held in his hands was *The Antiquary*. Mr. Stanley Baldwin has avowed his allegiance to Scott, as well as to Dickens; it might be called a life-long allegiance, for he had read *Guy Mannering*, *Ivanhoe*, *Rob Roy*, *The Pirate* and *Old Mortality* aloud to an aunt before he was nine. Sir Sidney Colvin said of Burne-Jones, "his two chief favourites" (among novelists) "being (as they are the favourites of every wise reader) Walter Scott and Dickens." They remained his favourites until the end of his life, and they were the favourites also of William Morris, and the little group of their intimates which included William de Morgan and Charles Faulkner. "Charles Dickens was ever an idol of mine," said De Morgan.

Sir Austen Chamberlain preferred Thackeray. In his delightful book, *Down the Years*, he talks of his "ladylove among the heroines of romance."

If in my thoughts I am ever unfaithful to Ethel Newcome it is to Beatrix Esmond that they stray. Becky Sharpe would have been a delightful companion at a dinner party, and if she cared to take the trouble, would have almost swept a man off his feet, but I couldn't marry Becky Sharpe.

On the whole, Thackeray was regarded by the persistent Victorians, as he had been by their fathers, with admiration rather than with the close personal affection they gave to Dickens. Lord Birkenhead, we are told, was fascinated by him, especially admiring *Esmond*. John Bailey said that Dickens was much more of a man of genius though much less a man of letters than Thackeray. There was a certain class—not a large one—of readers who though their sympathies were in general strongly Victorian, could not help regarding Dickens as somewhat vulgar, and expended all their praises upon Thackeray. Those gentlewomen of Mr. H. A. Vachell's acquaintance who, in 1885, looked down their noses and shrugged their shoulders when any attempt was made to

exalt Dickens above Thackeray, continued that practice through the 'nineties. Thackeray, they said, "was a scholar and a gentleman while Dickens portrayed low life, and was incurably sentimental."

Ruskin still remained for the Victorians the supreme authority on Beauty, in nature, in art, and in the social order, and Carlyle was still their prophet. Tourists still went eagerly to visit any scene that Ruskin had praised; visitors to picture galleries at home and abroad arrived with *Modern Painters* in their hands. *Sesame and Lilies* was still read, in spite of the scorn of the robuster Feminists. Sir Charles Dilke had on his shelves a little volume bound in white vellum in which his wife had written out for him some of the most beautiful passages from the second chapter of *Sesame, Queen's Gardens*. Bishop Westcott did not make acquaintance with John Ruskin until he was over sixty. "All my reading of him is less than ten years old," he wrote in 1900, "but he has been one of my best teachers since I came to the North." George Wyndham knew his works well, and often quoted from them. "Ruskin, with some admixture of folly has got nearer the heart of truth than anyone," he said. John Middleton Murry says that when he went up to Oxford in 1908 he had as classical tutor H. F. Fox, who, he said, was a man in a thousand, a fine scholar and a fine cricketer.

He let in upon me the breath of a larger air. . . . Matthew Arnold and Clough and Browning he liked, Ruskin he revered; but *Sartor Resartus* was his Bible. He pressed it upon me and was a little disappointed that my response was less than ecstatic, but I found it difficult.

It was not altogether incumbent on the persistent Victorian that he should love Browning, though to do so gave added strength to his title. Even in the heyday of his late-in-coming popularity, Browning was the poet only of the elect, and after his death in 1889 he retained upon the reading public no hold comparable to that of Tennyson. But to the faithful few he was still the poet of their supreme devotion. Miss Edith Cooper (Michael Field), paying tribute to him soon after his death, said that he had given the English people

access to the spiritual world quite apart from Revelation—he has shown them the deep things of Revelation as in *Karshish*, but he has found new pathways to God.

Lord Haldane read Browning and loved him; Bishop Talbot was all his life his devoted admirer. Sir George Trevelyan said in 1904, when he was sixty-two years old, after re-reading *Pippa Passes*:—

What a poem it is! So full of beauty, humour, knowledge of Italy and knowledge of mankind. There is nothing, so far as I know, which is at once so perfect and so unlike anything else in the world.

There remained for a good many years after Browning's death a remnant of that company of readers who, in Victorian times, had loved to consider his poems as conundrums to which they alone were privileged to know the answer. Stopford Brooke, himself a true Browning lover, spoke of them in 1899 as those who

finding Browning's work difficult to unravel set to work to unravel it, and having accomplished this not very difficult business, said to themselves how clever we are and how much we enjoy poetry, but their real enjoyment is their own intellectual exercise.

Another ten years or so found a generation growing up that scarcely knew anything about Browning except, as Henry Nevinson said, for "catching rats and riding to Ghent." "Ageing readers," Mr. Nevinson went on, "recall him with a regretful, an almost apologetic pleasure. At one time he meant so much to them; his revelation was like the vision of a new world." These readers were, clearly, only half-hearted in their faith. The true Victorian—especially if he were also a Browningite—was never in the least apologetic about his great writers, and they never meant less to him at the end of his life than they had done when he loved them first. Most of them would have replied to the strictures of the rising generation in the spirit of John Bailey when he said, in 1910, the young "critics say Browning is dead. One can only reply—they'll be dead first, if they ever come alive."

Matthew Arnold never had a large following, but the few found in him a wise and noble friend with whom they could live in closest, most fruitful intimacy. Lord Morley said, "One of the slender volumes of his verse has made a cherished companion of mine on many a journey." Henry Arthur Jones, the dramatist, loved him dearly. Mr. Augustine Birrell's tribute has already been quoted. When Arnold died in 1888 John Bailey wrote to Arthur Hughes:—

I can't tell you how I felt about Matthew Arnold's death. Your letter was the first word I heard of it, and it shocked and startled me terribly. Just as you say he was nearer to our hearts and true lives than any other writer, and I know no one to whom I owe so much.

Many of the persistent Victorians were fathers and mothers of families and they brought up their children in their own faith. There were households all over England that remained untouched by the turmoil of the 'nineties and the pleasure-seeking and vulgarity of the Edwardian period. In the nurseries and schoolrooms of these households were many of the books that had nourished a previous generation. *Magnall's Questions* had for the most part disappeared, but *Reading Without Tears* was still there and *Little Arthur's History* and Mrs. Markham. On the children's own bookshelves were the old favourites, the works of Charlotte Yonge and Louisa Alcott and Mrs. Ewing, with *Westward Ho!*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Alice in Wonderland* and even *Jessica's First Prayer*. A great many mothers still considered—as Mr. Horace Vachell tells us the wife of a certain major of his acquaintance did—that Miss Yonge was “the greatest influence for good in modern literature, a sort of intimately personal guide to right thinking and right-living maidenhood;” and a great many aunts and uncles handed on to the next generation the stories they themselves had read in their childhood, as Galsworthy's June Forsyte handed on “the books that had nurtured her own Berserker spirit, born in the noted year of 1869,” to her little nephew Jon, who surrendered forthwith to their enchantment.

As soon as the children reached a suitable age their parents introduced them to the great writers whom they themselves loved. Miss Ellen Aldin says she read *David Copperfield* at six. Dame Laura Knight and her sisters while they were still small children read and re-read the works of Dickens and Thackeray until they knew them by heart. Berta Ruck tells how on her eleventh birthday, in 1889, her father gave her *Dombey and Son* at breakfast time, and in the evening was amazed to find she had read it right through. He proceeded to examine her on its contents. “What did Captain Cuttle give Florence Dombey for dinner?” The answer came promptly. “Chicken it is. Liver wing it is! Sausage it is. Bread sauce it is. *And potato.*” Often these works were read to the children by their parents, for in these Victorian households the

pleasant custom of reading aloud still lingered after the fashion of the day had decreed its banishment. B. Farjeon, the novelist, read aloud to his family every night that he was at home Dickens and Lytton as well as the too thrilling Dumas. Bishop Knox says that he had only two resources for keeping order among his six children; one was to read to them *Peveril of the Peak*, "which they enjoyed passionately," the other to induce them to play its heroine, Fenella—one taking the part of the dumb girl, the others trying to make her laugh. "To the English classics my mother returned again and again," says the daughter of Wilfrid Ward, "and her family were brought up on Dickens, Sir Walter and Shakespeare."

Miss Lena Ashwell gives a delightful picture of her home at Chelsea in the later 'nineties. Both her father and mother were true Victorians in their literary tastes. They loved Tennyson "for the music of the verse and the exquisite descriptions of English country." Her father loved Dickens and Kingsley and Shakespeare and Marryat and brought up his family to love them too. Their life, says Miss Ashwell, was

in the 'nineties, the close of the Victorian age, sound, merry, clean, not sour, not cramped or narrow. United under the Queen Empress the nation had reached the high serenity of righteous government and imperial power, leading mankind towards Freedom. In armed security and public peace we were approaching the Diamond Jubilee, that culmination of all earthly grandeur.

At school, too, the young people often found themselves under strong Victorian influences. Miss Alice Ottley, the famous head-mistress of Worcester High School from 1883 to 1912, was a Tennyson enthusiast. She chose for the school motto "The white flower of a blameless life," and we are told that for many years no girl in the upper forms left the High School without having committed to memory Tennyson's *Dedication to the Idylls of the King*. Miss Vera Brittain says that her history and literary teacher succeeded in filling her with a tremendous enthusiasm for the works of Carlyle and Ruskin. At Winchester School Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* was set for study, and Mr. Herbert Asquith tells how the boys became somewhat irritated at the negative virtues of King Arthur, but this, he says, "did not blind us to the superb qualities of Tennyson's other poems—*Ulysses*, *The Lotus Eater*,

The Dying Swan." The Winchester boys read also Browning, Swinburne, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope and George Eliot.

It might well be thought that with so many parents and teachers at work impressing their own enthusiasms upon the young people under their guidance the Victorian succession was assured, and that a new generation was growing up to maintain the glory of Tennyson and Dickens. But this was not so. Outside influences and the spirit of the age were working against it. The most loyal parents could not pass on their loyalties to their children. To Robertson Nicoll it was a constant amazement that none of his children could be induced to read either Dickens or Scott. Miss Vera Brittain says that her mother read Dickens to them on Sunday afternoons. "We ploughed through *David Copperfield* and *Nicholas Nickleby* in this manner, which perhaps explains why I have never been able to finish anything else by Dickens, except a *Tale of Two Cities*." "It was a deep disappointment to my parents that I disliked Scott," says Miss Ellen Aldin.

It was partly because the parents were injudicious and pressed these works unduly upon their children. Tennyson became a schoolroom exercise, and boys and girls wearied of *Lady Clare* and *The Revenge* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, under the conscientious explanations of their teachers. They had to recite the poems, too, and listen to them being recited by others. Miss Ellen Aldin says that at the theological College of which her father was Principal the students, on social occasions, would be asked to recite. "How unutterably weary I became of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*—it always seemed to be that." She would doubtless have welcomed, as a relief from boredom, any slip made by the reciter, such as that recorded in Mrs. Barclay's *Rosary* of the young man who at a village concert informed his audience, with appropriate gesture and expression, that it was

Theirs not to make reply;
Theirs not to do or die;
Theirs but to reason why.

Occasionally one of the young people discovered a Victorian writer for himself, and read him with unhampered enjoyment. Mr. Herbert Palmer, speaking of the poets who attracted him in his early days, says, "I read Tennyson the most thoroughly of all, even more than Spenser, for he told short tales easy to follow and

I liked his Keatsian flavour and his religious romanticism." Vera Brittain discovered Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* and found it enchanting. But too often the attraction did not last. John Middleton Murry once in his youth launched out upon *The Idylls of the King*. "It seems to me pretty thin stuff to-day . . . but I rather enjoyed it at sixteen."

Victorianism was rapidly dying out and when the devastating upheaval of 1914 came it nearly—but even then not quite—disappeared; and after the war the great Victorian writers were found to have joined the company that is not for an age but for all time.

CHAPTER XVII

1914

LOOKING back now to the four years that came between the death of Edward VII and the outbreak of the Great War we see them as a steady progress towards the evil day. "Nineteen-fourteen" is for us writ large all over them, and we think of all their happenings in relation to that fateful year. But, at the time, Englishmen, unaware of the impending cataclysm, went on their way as usual, though there was a general uneasy apprehension of impending change. The nine years of the reign of Edward VII had had a notable effect on the temper of the English nation. When Queen Victoria died, her people, even those who in her later years had rebelled against the spirit of her rule, were profoundly moved. They felt that not only a great queen and a good woman but an Age had passed away; but they looked to the New Age with confidence. Many, it is true, shook their heads with Soames Forsyte, and opined, "Things would never be as safe again as under good old Viccy," but there was no real apprehension. England was still England, great and victorious, and would go on to higher triumphs yet. But the death of Edward VII seemed to many people, and especially, perhaps, to those of the upper classes, the removal of a support that had done much to keep things stable in a dangerously unstable world. The uneasiness that had obtruded into the gay Edwardian scene was intensified. "With so much Socialism about one does not know what may happen," lamented the Duchess of Miss Sackville-West's *The Edwardians*, "and now that the King is dead I expect it will get worse. I always felt that he kept things together, somehow." Nobody knew very much about the new king. His was not a personality that impressed itself at once upon his people as his father's and his grandmother's had done. "Poor things," said the Duchess's friend, Mrs. Levison, referring to him and his queen, "we must all do what we can to help them." The Duchess was not sure how far King George and Queen Mary would welcome such assistance; and, as she said, "In the meantime, what will become of us?"

Nobody guessed what was to become of England. Nobody saw the horror into which before long she would be plunged. The

symptoms of national ill-health were plain for all to see—class strife, labour troubles, strikes, the war of the suffragettes, unrest and disaffection in Ireland. There were some who read the signs of the times with sufficient accuracy to predict a great war, but even they realized little what such a war would mean to the country; and the warnings that these men tried to give fell, for the most part, unheeded. Various writers were prophesying evil things, and calling the nation to action. Robert Blatchford's articles on the German menace, which had appeared in the *Daily Mail*, had just been published in pamphlet form, and this pamphlet was being widely read all over the country. The authorities treated Blatchford as a scaremonger, and most readers were inclined to agree; only a few took alarm. Norman Angell's book, *The Great Illusion*, was published in the year of King George's accession. It attempted to show that from an economic point of view war was futile and wrong—setting aside for the moment all considerations of morality and religion. No country, declared Mr. Angell, could hope to reap any material gain from a successful war. Large indemnities were impossible. The idea was a new one to many people who had thought vaguely of the victorious nation imposing what terms it liked upon the defeated; and the book made some sensation, though not as much as might have been expected. The *Nation* said, "No piece of political thinking has in recent years more stirred the world that controls the movement of politics." Sir Edward Grey, speaking at the National Liberal Club, acknowledged indebtedness to it. "The idea of the economic futility of conquest, which had recently done so much to bring permanent peace within the sphere of practical politics, was one that had been first brought to his vision by Mr. Norman Angell's book."

The growing sense of unrest which these and other warnings were augmenting led a good many people who had hitherto lived very much on the surface of life to go a little deeper, and try to distinguish between the true and the false, the ephemeral and the lasting; and this added seriousness of outlook had its effect on their choice of books for reading. In 1913 Alfred Austin died, and was succeeded in his office by Robert Bridges. If the appointment of the new Laureate could have been regarded as resulting from the free choice of the nation as a whole, it would have been of considerable significance; but obviously the nation as a whole had nothing to do with it. The majority of readers, including many of

intelligence and taste, were mildly surprised at hearing that the honour had been bestowed upon a man whose name they only vaguely remembered hearing. "Who is Robert Bridges?" many people were heard to ask. "Mr. Bridges has been as careful, not to say perverse, in avoiding fame as other men are in seeking for it," said John Bailey. In an article in the *Quarterly* of July 1913, entitled "The Poetry of Robert Bridges," Mr. Bailey had attempted to enlighten the public as to the poet and his work. He began his article by saying, "One of the pleasantest features in the intellectual landscape of the moment is unquestionably the revival of poetry," and he went on to bring evidence in support of this statement. The poets of the new reign had combined to set up a poetry bookshop which was intended to be a centre of encouragement and help to their brotherhood; they had established a quarterly Georgian poetry review; and they had published a volume of Georgian verse. It was significant, Mr. Bailey pointed out, that they had dedicated this volume not to one of their own company or generation but to Mr. Bridges, who was at this time seventy years old. From these facts, from the increasing sale of Mr. Bridges' works and the favourable notice they had received from critics, it was clear that, in the choice of the new Laureate, "the appointment which would be received with most satisfaction among those who love and practise English literature is that of Mr. Bridges." Mr. Bridges, as has been said, was appointed, and poetry lovers rejoiced, but, as the *Athenaeum* remarked, "It is hardly to be expected that the appointment will have much appeal to the general public." The public, indeed, showed itself only slightly interested, less so than when Alfred Austin had been chosen, for then, at least, the newspapers and general comment had provided them with something to laugh at. Yet the choice of Robert Bridges did tend to show that the keen interest in poetry that had been widespread in the 'nineties had remained alive in certain quarters throughout the discouraging influences of the years that had followed, and that the standard of poetic value was, in fact, rising. It is doubtful whether, if the vacancy had occurred ten years before, any reader, however enthusiastic for Bridges, would have had the temerity seriously to propose his name. The lack of opposition in 1913 was, it must be allowed, largely due to apathy and ignorance. Yet there was considerable support for the proposal, and no one seriously demurred at it.

There is significance also in the result of a ballot organized by the *Journal of Education*, before the appointment to the Laureateship was made, in which readers were asked to name the three greatest living English poets in order of excellence. The choice ran, Kipling, Watson, Bridges, which is one that most later students of the period would endorse—possibly altering the order. It was a choice made by a handful of presumably educated and intelligent people, and was by no means representative of any considerable section; but it did show that there were at least a few readers who took poetry seriously and recognized the best when they saw it.

There were other poets who had been making a name for themselves during the Edwardian period, but none of them had come sufficiently into public notice by 1913 to be put forward as candidates for the Laureateship. "If you happen to read *Songs of Childhood*, by Walter Ramal (Walter de la Mare)," wrote Henry Scott Holland to a friend, in 1902, "will you tell me what you think of them? Several of them seem to me to possess magic, e.g. the *Englishman*, the *Ogre* and the *Sapper*. They are by an old choirboy, and Henry Newbolt is greatly struck with them." De la Mare soon dropped his pseudonym of Walter Ramal, and his name became known as that of a writer whose verse had a mystical beauty, strange and appealing. *The Listeners* came in 1912 and *Peacock Pie* in 1913, and both were read with delight by a growing body of admirers. "Sat in the garden reading De la Mare's delightful *Listeners*," wrote John Bailey; "he has more sense of the beauty and mystery of things, especially 'the silence and the calm,' than any poet since Wordsworth." "We were enchanted by the verses of Walter de la Mare . . . whose little book, *The Listeners*, appeared at this moment," said John Middleton Murry.

John Masefield was another of the rising poets. He had begun his career in 1902 with *Saltwater Ballads*, and had since published *The Everlasting Mercy*, 1911, and *The Widow in the Bye Street*, 1912. Winston Churchill greatly admired his work, especially *The Everlasting Mercy*. Raymond Blathwayt cited this poem as an example of one that presents a new view of life to the reader's mind. Henry Nevinson was another admirer and John Freeman another. The younger generation of readers soon discovered him, and found in the poignant beauty of his verse sympathy with their problems if not answers to them. "There is little doubt that John Masefield is the most popular of our young poets," said

the *Fortnightly*, in July 1914, after the publication of *Daffodil Fields*.

The novel readers, too, were showing a tendency to turn to more satisfying fare than that on which they had been for a good many years regaled. Marie Corelli's public had shrunk almost to insignificance, and the tone of her works had grown shriller in consequence. Hall Caine and Mrs. Humphry Ward had, as Mr. Swinnerton puts it, become the occasion for ribald comment. The Edwardian entertainers were proving not quite as successful with the Georgians as with their earlier audiences. It was not that they were less applauded or that the sale of their books declined; but readers were showing signs of a consciousness that more was wanted than they could give and were turning to the works of other writers. Two, more especially, were coming into favour, John Galsworthy and Joseph Conrad. Both had been writing for a good many years, but to both success had come tardily. John Galsworthy has said that when *The Man of Property* was published in 1906 he had been writing nearly eleven years "without making a penny, or any name to speak of." *The Man of Property* made him known, but by 1914 he was only on the way to the wide popularity that was later to be his. Many people knew him only as the author of *Fraternity*, and other novels with a social purpose; his power as a storyteller was not fully recognized. There was an impression that he dealt only with the hard and painful side of life. The *Spectator* had said of *The Man of Property*:—

Mr. Galsworthy has given us a novel at once so able that it cannot be overlooked, and so ugly in places that it cannot be recommended without a serious caution. . . . There are moments of geniality in it—notably in the accounts of old Jolyon's secret visits to his son and grandchildren—and there is a certain dignity and even grandeur in the conception of the grim family spirit which watches over each member of the group. But the resultant impression in the main is so distressing that, while respecting the remarkable talent displayed by the author, we cannot but regret the use to which he has been constrained to put it.

Other reviews had dwelt more on the lights of the book and less on the shadows, but the general impression given was a gloomy one; so that while a large circle of Galsworthy enthusiasts was being formed there were other circles that were not attracted, and which his books did not reach for a good many years.

After *The Man of Property* Galsworthy deserted the ~~ized~~ by for a time. The books that came between 1907 and 1913 were not among the most popular of his works, and *The Dark* three (1913) left some of his readers a little puzzled as to what the choice of the book really was. H. G. Wells wrote to Galsworthy concerning *The Country House* (1910), "Your range is wide; it seems to you to look at things from the point of view of a very intelligent class indeed." E. V. Lucas did not like this book as well as *Property*. Thomas Hardy, however, thought highly of it and a large number of readers were charmed by one of its writers, Mrs. Pendyce, and for her sake praised it enthusiastically— "Mrs. Pendyce rejoices everyone," said Henry Nevinson, who was one of Galsworthy's warmest admirers. He was, he said, "strangely incapable of novel-reading," but he read each *idyll* of Galsworthy's books as it came out. Galsworthy's works, undoubtedly, tended to deepen the serious note that was to be heard in literature during the years immediately preceding the Great War.

Conrad made his first popular success with *Chance*, published in 1913, though he had been writing since 1898, and had already produced the novels that many critics consider to be his best—*Youth*, *Typhoon*, *Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Mirror of the Sea*, *Lord Jim*. He had had from the first some convinced admirers, Henry Newbolt, Arnold Bennett and A. J. Balfour among them. After the publication of *Chance* his earlier novels, which had had only a very small sale, were eagerly bought and read, and he joined Galsworthy as a successful author.

Feminist literature was, during these pre-War years, changing its character. Little was coming from within the movement except speeches and pamphlets; from without, the semi-humorous attacks which, so far, had been the main form of literary effort directed against it were giving place to serious studies of its nature and its manifestations. "The average man was not aware of Feminism until the persistent advertising methods of the militant societies focussed attention on the woman movement," said Miss Ethel Colquhoun, reviewing some half dozen of these studies in the *Quarterly* of July 1913. Now that he was aware of it he began to get interested, and in some cases rather alarmed. It seemed as if the women might be successful and the vote might be given to them. What then would be the result, on the country as a whole?

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want passionately rather than from ardent adherents. Convinced
other anti-Suffragists illustrated the disastrous results of the methods
adopted by the militants, and asked, in effect, what good could
possibly come from such violence. This was the method adopted
by Mrs. Humphry Ward in her *Delia Blanchflower*. In *The*
Coryston Family, published in 1913, she held up the political
woman, in the person of Lady Coryston, to obloquy; but since
Lady Coryston had no vote, and without it was able to influence
disastrously both public and private affairs, the book can hardly
be considered as an argument on the side of the anti-Suffragist.
In W. H. Beveridge's sketch, *John and Irene*, some people thought
they discerned, in spite of its light ironic tone, a valuable moral.
John, a convinced and ardent supporter of the Feminists, married
Irene, a thoughtless, pleasure-loving girl, who, under his influence,
became an enthusiastic convert to the Cause. But, in the process of
conversion John had become completely disenchanted. The result
of his proselytizing efforts was not at all what he had expected it
to be. Instead of now being in perfect agreement, as he had hoped,
he and Irene were more hopelessly at odds than they had been at
first, and at length, after a violent quarrel,

They parted in anger that afternoon and would not meet again.
Irene . . . stepping into John's place in the (Feminist) ranks has
brought the Feminist library which he has sold, and John, who
cannot dance, has again been seen at dances.

All these books were a good deal talked about, and discussion
often grew heated and angry; until, as Miss May Sinclair says,

"the little vortex of the Woman's Movement was swept without a sound into the immense vortex of the War."

The vogue of the thriller was not affected unfavourably by the sombre tinge that was creeping over the nation's outlook; as a means of escape from strain and apprehension it was now doubly welcome. Detective stories of various types were being supplied in generous measure in answer to the demand. Among the rest there came in 1913 *Trent's Last Case*, by E. C. Bentley. To the general public the name of the author was unknown, but the book looked interesting and a good many people bought it; and, reading it, found it so good that they quickly spread its fame. It was, they said, quite as thrilling as a "Sherlock Holmes." The mystery was one that baffled even experienced readers of detective stories, and its solution was not only unexpected, but was arrived at in a novel fashion. Soon the more serious critics, who seldom gave much attention to works of this class, began to get interested. Here was a detective story which, instead of being merely read through breathlessly for the sake of its plot, could be enjoyed as a work of art. Its characters were real men and women, its literary style was excellent. "One at least of the hundreds of detective stories written during the first quarter of the century belongs to literature," says Professor A. C. Ward, with reference to it, in his *Twentieth Century Literature*. People who did not as a rule read detective stories read *Trent's Last Case*, and the usual devotees gave it a high place among their favourites.

Yet not the poems nor the novels nor even the thrillers of the day had anything like the number of readers who habitually drew their sustenance from *Tit-Bits*, *Answers* and the *Daily Mail*. The New Journalism—though it was no longer new enough to be novel—was still attracting hundreds of thousands of half-educated readers who desired to read without being obliged to think. Fresh publications of the same class continued to appear almost every week, and these, too, found buyers. The appetite for such literature seemed to be almost insatiable. It may be accounted as one of the misfortunes of the years that brought us to the War that so large a part of the nation nourished itself upon snippets and sensational headlines which could only result in intellectual laziness and muddled thinking. "They used to say, 'Move with the *Times*,'" said Nadine, of E. F. Benson's *Dodo the Second*. "Now we move with the *Daily Mail*."

This book, *Dodo the Second*, though it made no such sensation as did the first *Dodo*, is interesting as giving Mr. E. F. Benson's impressions of a certain section of society in the period immediately preceding the Great War, some twenty years later than the era of the Souls. It is obviously written with the direct intention of contrasting the two periods, and is probably trustworthy, as far as it goes, if it is not taken too literally. It is the young people of whom—excepting Dodo herself—Mr. Benson tells us most; and it is of the young people we want to hear. It is they who were most important at this particular time—they who were to be called upon for the most heroic action during the terrible years of war, they who were to build up a world to take the place of the one the war had destroyed.

Dodo is now forty-five, and her daughter, Nadine, is twenty-two. Round them is gathered a company of young people belonging to the wealthy and leisured class, yet not solely fashionable pleasure seekers. They all seem to have caught Dodo's trick of discursive, flippant and lively chatter, but they have developed, we are given to understand, intellectual interests that differentiate them widely from their forebears. Nadine is deeply interested in Greek culture, studies Plato and quotes Socrates; she reads Walter Pater and *Madame Bovary* and presumably Tolstoi also, since she has written an article on him which has been published in a magazine. *Pride and Prejudice* she criticizes as "beautifully done; none but an artist could have done it. But I find a great deal of it dull." Seymour, son of Lord Ayr, is a connoisseur in jade, lace, exotic novels and cookery. John, brother of Seymour, devotes himself to utilitarian literature, mistakes "quantity of information for quality of mind" and thinks that "large numbers of facts, even such low facts as dates, have in themselves something to do with culture." All the "clan" as they call themselves, are familiar with Swinburne (especially *Poems and Ballads*), Stevenson, Browning and *Alice in Wonderland*. They are superior concerning the popular writers of their own day, Mr. Chesterton and other philosophers, who, says Nadine,

sit down soberly to think, and when they have thought they wrap up their thought in paradox, as you wrap up a pill for your dog, so that he swallows it without thinking, and his inside becomes bitter and aches. That is not the way. You must start with pure

enjoyment, and when a thought comes you must fling it into the air.

They are on the side of the Romantics and are very severe on those who "are not content with the wonder and romance of the world" but "prefer to explain the rainbow away instead of looking at it. It is a sort of murder to explain things away; you kill their souls, and demonstrate that they are only hydrogen."

They discuss what is meant by nonsense. "Is it what Mr. Shaw writes in his plays, or Mrs. Humphry Ward writes in her books? They neither mean anything but they are not at all alike. In fact they are as completely opposed to each other as sense is to nonsense." Thus Nadine. "True," replies Berts, another of the clan, aged twenty-one, "but they are neither of them nonsense. The lame and the halt and the blind ideas creep into both. They both talk sense mortally wounded." "Oh, Berts, how true!" sighs Esther (sister of Seymour and John), "I went to a play by Mrs. Humphry Ward or else I read a book by Mr. Bernard Shaw, I forget which, and all the time I kept trying to see what the sense of it had been before it had its throat cut."

The "ribald comment" of this *Dodo* group exemplifies the attitude towards Mrs. Ward taken by a certain class of readers, though by the majority she was still highly esteemed both as a teller of stories and a painter of the manners of the time. "The painting of society manners is for the moment somewhat out of date," said the *Nineteenth Century* for January 1913, "for in the first place, there is no Society with a big S in the old sense, and there are no manners. There are groups and coteries." The works of E. F. Benson and Mrs. H. Ward show that this pronouncement must be accepted with reservations. We may perhaps grant that groups and coteries have taken the place of a once coherent and exclusive Society. We may even be forced to agree if the severe critic would deny to the group depicted by Mr. Benson the possession of the desirable adjunct of manners. But to Mrs. Humphry Ward's characters such possession cannot be denied, and the truthfulness of her presentation is beyond question. In *The Making of Lydia* and *The Coryston Family* both published in 1913, we are introduced to political circles, where move high dignitaries of the State, and to Anglican circles which retain the standards and the fastidiousness of the age dominated by the Tractarians; and in

both these circles "manners" are part of the daily life. The young people of *Dodo* would doubtless have considered Marcia Coryston a very dull person, suffering from all sorts of repressions. She was interested in many things—in books—in the Suffrage—in the girls' debating society of which she was secretary—in politics—in modern poetry. In reality her whole being hung like some chained Andromeda at the edge of the sea of life, expecting Perseus.

Decidedly old-fashioned, Nadine would have said, a victim of sex obsession which she had not the sense to relieve by talking about it. Yet Nadine and her friends, in spite of their flippancy and their determination to be amused and amusing, were conscious that the new fashions had lost something that the old had possessed. They were fully aware that they themselves were not really as light-hearted as their fathers and mothers had been, or even as they still were, for these older folk still kept something of the romance and high spirit they had brought from the adventurous 'nineties. "I am interested in Plato and in all the novels about social reform and dull people who live in sordid respectability, which mamma finds so utterly tedious," says Nadine. "We are really much more serious than they," says Berts, and the rest agree.

From Edith, one of the older generation (who, it is to be remembered, stands in the first *Dodo* for Dame Ethel Smyth) we have a vigorous criticism of the novels of the period. "Any book that deals with entirely dull people, provided that they none of them show a spark of real fire or are touched by romance or joy or beauty makes a success. They must have the smell of oilcloth and Irish stew around them, and then the world says, 'This is art,' or 'This is reality.'" *Dodo* is in entire agreement with Edith. She has been looking through the new novels that have just arrived from the library, and complains that they are "like leaders in the newspapers, full of reliable information." One is about Home Rule, another about Soap, a third about Tariff Reform, a fourth about Christianity, and a fifth told how the heroine left Euston for Birmingham by the 2.30 train, after having bought a ticket which cost nine and twopence-halfpenny—the shocking accuracy of which statement was confirmed by reference to an A B C railway guide.

It is not quite clear of what novels these ladies were thinking when they made these criticisms. Certainly not the works of Conrad; hardly those of Galsworthy, who, although he is serious

is neither sordid nor obtrusively informative. It was assuredly not Mrs. Florence Barclay's *The Broken Halo* which had just been published, and over which thousands of readers were weeping enjoyable tears; for her readers lived in a world lifted high above sordid cares and where there was no need for useful information. The great public that had read and acclaimed *The Rosary* would never have forgiven its author any descent to the commonplace. *The Broken Halo* was about a Little White Lady, old but of incredible beauty and charm, a brilliant young doctor who loved her to distraction, a saintly murderer who, on the gallows, murmured with her last breath the name of the husband she had murdered, and a grim ex-prison wardress who kept faithful watch over the Little White Lady. An unkind critic of this book said, "Mrs. Barclay is fortunate in a genius not above the appreciation of the material and illiterate age in which we live." She appealed to a large circle—a circle remote from that in which lived Nadine and her friends, who had probably scarcely heard her name.

The novels which seem to approach most closely to Edith's description are the Five Towns stories of Arnold Bennett. *Hilda Lessways*, the second volume of the *Clayhanger* series had been published in 1910, and the public was anxiously awaiting the third instalment of the promised trilogy. In *Hilda Lessways*, if the smell of "oilcloth and Irish stew" is absent there are even worse emanations, "nauseating, malodorous," from a "mess of broken food and greasy plates," and there is much exact information on such subjects as the washing of floors, the management of boarding houses and the symptoms of sciatica. Or possibly the two ladies may have had in mind H. G. Wells's *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (1913) which contains a great deal of information on a variety of subjects, differing from those touched on by Mr. Bennett, but equally useful—the iniquity of the marriage laws, the strangling methods employed by capitalists, the wrongs suffered by work-people, especially by the women. In the intervals of these dissertations the book gives an interesting picture of one very common phase of the intellectual life of the time. It shows a girl, intelligent but unawakened, struggling out of an ignorant passivity, which is the result of her upbringing, and by the help of books and through contact with the social forces working around her, becoming at length an educated and useful woman; and all this in spite of an illiterate capitalist husband who cannot see that the reading of

"Bernud Shaw and Gosworthy and the rest of them" can do her any good.

A book that should have been more to Dodo's taste was G. K. Chesterton's *The Flying Inn* (1914) with its tilting against Puritanism and against the legislation that would interfere with man's liberty to enjoy the good gifts that Providence has bestowed upon him. The *Athenaeum* charged Mr. Chesterton with flogging a dead horse, and said that half of the book's three hundred pages would have contained "all that is worth remembering, though that half is really memorable. The other half we regard as a sop thrown to a public whose inconstant temper makes it necessary to provide incessant relief from seriousness." So that obviously there was a section of the public in sympathy with Dodo and ready for a little more romance, not to say frivolity.

Romance of a kind came early in 1914 with Mr. H. G. Wells's *The World Set Free*, to which the date of its publication has given a special significance. It was a work after his old style, scientific, social, prophetic. It told of a Great War in which the almost total destruction of Europe was brought about by "atomic bombs" which had resulted from the discovery of the means by which the energy of the atom could be released. The war began "obviously enough," says Mr. Wells, with a German invasion of France by way of Belgium. After the war came the building up of a new world, on a purely scientific basis, in which men lived the ordered, scientifically controlled lives which Mr. Wells regarded as the ideal existence.

These are some of the books that the people of England were reading when the great call came in August 1914 which suspended all activities save the direful activities of war. When, after the first bewilderment of the shock had passed, men returned to their books, they did so with their outlook altered and their sense of values transformed. They found then that it was the old favourites that served them best, the books of the immortals that had stood the test of time and change. In the new literature—the literature of the war—that was springing up around them there was much that was cheap and sensational and vainglorious; but there was not wanting the high, true note of a pure patriotism. It was with this note sounding in their ears that thousands of our fighting men went out. It was this note that people at home tried to catch above all the shouting and the tumult. It sounded very clearly in Rudyard

Kipling's "For all we have and are," which almost reached the height of his *Recessional*; and men and women, feeling that "the ages' slow bought gain" had, indeed, "shriveled in a night," faced the stark suffering of those testing years helped by his words,

In courage keep your heart,
In strength lift up your hand.

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